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JUDITH SILVER

# OTHER BOOKS

*by*

## *HECTOR BOLITHO*

Solemn Boy (*2nd Impression*)
Thistledown and Thunder
The New Zealanders

WITH THE DEAN OF WINDSOR
The Letters of Lady Augusta Stanley

# JUDITH SILVER

*by*

## *HECTOR BOLITHO*

*"By the pricking of my thumbs*
*Something wicked this way comes"*

Second Witch
Macbeth, Act IV. Scene I.

*ALFRED A. KNOPF*
*LONDON*
1929

FIRST PUBLISHED, JANUARY 1929.
SECOND IMPRESSION, FEBRUARY 1929.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, GLASGOW,
FOR ALFRED A. KNOPF LTD.

*TO*

*ETHELRED FRANCES BOLITHO*

*MY MOTHER*

D 7299

67/1602
SS

# *BOOK ONE*

# CHAPTER I

## I

Simon and his father lived in Karangahake. Three years ago they had come from Australia to this little village with the strange Maori name. Australia meant nothing to James Grantham, for he had been born in New Zealand and all the happy experiences of his life were associated with some part of its earth. Sometimes he closed his eyes and remembered the dim monotony of his journeys to the cemetery on the coast near Sydney. Simon had been at school. When his holidays came they used to pack themselves into a hot black cab and drive out to the grave at the harbour heads, where the quick wind came up from the Pacific. Twice a year they stood there. In summer, the sun baked the earth on the grave until it cracked and blew about in little whirlwinds of dust. They didn't know each other very well. Simon lived in a world of games and pillow fights and stomach aches and spinning tops and dirty hands and uncombed hair. His father was thirty-seven, a tall, nervous man with unsteady eyes and irritating, restless hands —He dashed from place to place, always uncomfortable, always losing his luggage, always

analysing his own character with morbid persistence.

So when they went to the cemetery, Simon had moved restlessly beside his father, as an intruder, trying to grieve for a mother he had not known, and dreading the return journey in the shaking black cab.

They had buried her in a beautiful place. It wasn't like any other cemetery. The water touched the sand at the foot of the hill. It came riding in, a heaving blue-silver expanse upon which the sun lowered great shafts of amber light. The heat was so merciless that stranded jellyfish were baked to death on the sand. Gulls flew down and gouged out the eyes of the bream and mullet before they had completely struggled to death, where the sea had thrown them, high on the beach.

The gravestones were white in the sunshine, so that they looked positively gay—they might have been so many iced cakes standing there. Simon could never approach them solemnly, especially when the wattle flowers blew down and covered the ground with yellow. Sometimes the blossoms, like golden snow, were blown on to the tombstones, settling on marble wings and shoulders, and the lids of granite urns.

He did not remember the day when his mother was buried. But his father was continually aware of the afternoon when they carried her down the slope ; when he felt so remote from the burial itself, the red-faced

priest, and *her* mother, taking possession of every possible sentiment in her daughter's death. 'The grim reaper,' she had said, touching James with a limp hand that always reminded him of a fillet of warm lemon sole.

Each time they stood beside the grave, they placed new flowers on the mound and removed the dead wreaths they had brought there six months before—until there was a succession of bedraggled wreath frames behind the tombstone. James paid a man to remove them on the last day before they sailed to New Zealand.

He had known then—definitely, that he had not made the slightest advance towards knowing his son. His wife had died when Simon was born, so that there was nobody else in the world for him to love. His loneliness was so horrible that he thrived on the hope that, some day, he would make a great friend of this growing boy. 'He's my immortality,' he would say to himself, in the weeks before Simon came to him for the holidays ; and he would think of fathers he had known, fathers who were the friends of their sons.

Yet, when these two stood beside the grave, with the white gulls crying above them and the diligent red ants swarming over the hot earth, James Grantham knew that they were complete strangers, that the boy neither liked him nor knew him.

He made up his mind very quickly. He must possess this boy ; completely encircle him with his own character and personality—the phrase

*emotional miser* did not occur to him but it best described the sudden passion that came to him on that last day. The boy had none of *her* outline or colouring. He was more his son than hers. Besides, a living father had advantages over the memory of a dead mother, kept fresh by a sentimental grandmother. Simon was too completely surrounded by the outside influences of school and that frilly, unintelligent grandmother who cried over him. A new country, complete dissociation from everything he had known up to now would throw the boy more completely on him for guidance, entertainment, affection.

So, in his hustling way, he had ordered a monthly supply of flowers for the grave and he had watched Simon pack his football jerseys, and his photographs in which he was one of a group standing in front of a cricket pavilion. If the boy resented the change, he did not show it. Once, when his father had suffered from an excess of emotion, when he had embraced him, Simon had felt something wither within himself. He felt no desire to respond to his father. In the same way he was completely passive in the adventure of going on board a boat to sail away from everybody he liked and knew, for ever.

He had his twelfth birthday as they were crossing the Tasman Sea. His father gave him a silver watch which he had chosen before they sailed. Simon thanked him listlessly and opened it without any sense of discovery. He

thought of a dozen contemporaries going back to school, of their eager feet and their fun. He even thought of his stupid grandmother and the background of lace curtains and aspidistras against which she cried and drank tea and labelled the tragedy of her daughter's death as ' God's will.'

The little town in New Zealand was called Karangahake : Karangahake set between hills. Once it had been packed with miners and honeycombed with gold mines : then it groaned and panted and laughed. How cheerfully those thousands of men had tramped up the brown valley, building their gim-crack weatherboard houses on the calm hills, filling ungainly iron sheds with restless machines, and harnessing the stream in a vast iron pipe that twisted its way towards their settlement. Deeper they dug, richer they became, and the adventure of the first generation became the greed of the next.

The gold failed. They were defeated and they ran away. Their grotesque wooden houses were deserted on the hills. The roofs curved down under the weight of moss and rubbish ; the windows were smashed. The great steel pipe rusted away so that the water ran free again and the wooden piles and fences were covered with creepers and wild plants. Nature had made its protest against these greedy men and the hideous sores they had raised on the flanks of the hills.

The town died. A postmistress, a storekeeper,

and a few others clung to the deserted place, but they moved so silently about the foot of the hill that they seemed to live only behind a mist. Even the train ceased to consider Karangahake seriously and it seldom bothered to stop at the quiet little station.

Here James Grantham bought a house, roomy and comfortable, high on the hill, where he could walk on to his verandah and stretch his arms over the lifeless town. He was so far up that he imagined he could touch the sky.

Once a day there was a visitor—a Maori boy sent out from the store with a crazy, wobbly-wheeled trolley which he dragged up the hill. In it were groceries, rattling soda water syphons, golden marrows, a bag of potatoes, new bread, a folded newspaper and the day's letters, set on top and tied with pink tape. The little brown boy felt that he was moving towards Heaven each day when he climbed up the hill with Mr. Grantham's letters. Nothing so exciting had happened in Karangahake in all the years of his memory. Once his mother had received a letter from the Government. The manilla envelope with its green stamp was still on the mantelpiece, in their closely packed house. But Mr. Grantham had as many as eight letters a day, so many that the postmistress, who was the storekeeper's daughter, tied them together with tape.

Up the winding path he climbed. The trolley rattled over the stones and the soda

syphons made a jingling noise. In the early morning he was the only moving thing in that valley. James Grantham often watched him coming up the hill. The Maori boy would hand him the letters and take the parcels around to the back door. 'Ask Mrs. Tucker for a glass of ginger beer,' James would call after him.

When he went home at night, the boy would tell his mother about the smells of food that came from the Grantham kitchen, the particular morning mood of Mrs. Tucker, the number of letters. He would mention too, the occasions when he saw Simon sitting on the verandah, reading a book, or blowing up a football with which he used to play alone, on the more or less level stretch of ground beyond the orchard.

II

The morning came splendidly in Karangahake, especially in the spring. The hills were so steep that the moon had to climb high, if night time in the little town was to be anything but sombre and dark. From the verandah of the house, James Grantham could count the lights in the village—he knew where to see them. Only once had their number changed. That was in the winter, when an old man died in the solitary weather-board hut, on the other hill. He had been a watchman in the rich days of the mines and their failure had shaken his mind. He was old and mad, yet harmless, scowling at the world under his bushy eyebrows,

still swinging the bunch of keys he had carried in his days of importance.

James watched the pathetic orderliness of the funeral—first the school children, scrambling far into the hills to find white flowers. He watched them cutting the willows to make framework for the wreaths. It was winter time and the most meagre wild flower had been eagerly picked by their cold, purple fingers. He watched the women in their stiff galatea dresses, men in their Sunday suits and green-black bowler hats. He watched them carry the coffin out of the house. He thought of the funeral every time he counted the lights. But neither the gloom of night nor the memory of the mad old man had any place in the Spring mornings.

The French windows were left open all night, so that James and Simon were always awakened by sunshine. Yet each awoke in his own fashion. Simon would sit up, leap out of bed and run on to the verandah, in his pyjamas. Sometimes he would put on shorts, running shoes and a sweater and, jumping over the verandah railing, run down the hill, with Brindle. It was an indication of the healthy limitations of Simon's mind that he should have named his dog Brindle. Down the hill he'd run, aware that it was a wonderful morning, feeling very fit. He'd arrive at the Post Office, his face radiant with a smile which made the postmistress pleased to ignore the rules and give him the morning paper before the official

time. The storekeeper, seeing him through the glass door which led from the sitting room to the shop would say 'There's that young Grantham—a good lad.' And Simon would look in past the lace curtains, caught up in the centre with red ribbon, and see the old man, the embroidered velvet mantel cloth, the saddle-bag arm chair, the stark enlargement of a son lost at Gallipoli, and the geraniums, flaming in the window. Simon would wave the paper as a greeting and run out again, up the hill, and into his father's room. Then James would get up and go to the verandah. He'd see the sunlight burning on the iron roof of the shed, down in the valley, and feel the wooden railing of the verandah, warm beneath his hand. It seemed to enliven all his body. He'd see Simon, young and splendid, still panting, his shirt open at the neck, his sleeves rolled up above his elbows. His response to the morning was entirely physical. It was this healthy enjoyment of everything that gradually wore down the barrier between them. Not that Simon came to love his father. At one time he thought that James Grantham must be different from other men, but he came to wonder about it less and less. While there were gates to leap and rabbits to shoot, he did not mind the rather strained hour which followed dinner, when his father occasionally read him a story by Gorky or Tchehov. Simon would comprehend none of it, and while his father's voice droned on, he would wonder

whether he had put his gun away, whether that was Brindle, scratching at the door, or whether it would be worth while walking five miles next day to try for rabbits on a certain hill he knew. As he thought of these things, his father would read a story about some lunatics in a hospital and a doctor who also became a lunatic. And, if any of the facts of the story touched Simon at all, he thought his father must be a bit mad also, to read such *tripe*. The word was his own and to his mind it represented a definite standard of literary criticism.

James Grantham had been self-analytical ever since he was a boy. He talked of inhibitions and complexes. He found the habit counteracted, for the first time in his life, by the complete lack of self-consciousness in his son. Their friendship developed. One day Simon ran his fingers through his father's hair. James had been sitting on the verandah when Simon came up to him, from the garden. He had pointed the butt of a shot gun at him. 'Hands up!' he had demanded. James held his hands up and called 'Kamerad!' Then it was that Simon had been exuberant. He put his gun down and twisted his father's hair with both hands, vigorously. The older man glowed for days after that. He realised that if he wanted to retain the boy's friendship he must be young himself.

He wrote to a friend in Auckland and engaged a tutor to come and live with them for three months, in the late spring and early summer.

The experiment was dangerous, he thought, because he hadn't lost the desire to make Simon completely his own—he was still jealous as he had always been. His was an intolerant nature that loved people more for submission to his ideas than for the development of their own. He was conscious of this almost fiendish form of selfishness. 'I want a tutor for Simon. He must be a Catholic, but I don't want one with a strong personality. I want somebody who can teach him what he ought to know and not what he ought to think,' he had said in his letter.

The tutor came; a guileless M.A. He was thin and rakish, in ready-made clothes. His lower lip was loose. When he bathed he was conscious of his own nudity. He said *perspiration* instead of *sweat* and said that linen was *soiled* when it was *dirty*. He had a genteel and negative mind, prone to promiscuous quotation. On the day he arrived, he stood on the step and looked out over the bed of jonquils and said 'All at once I saw a host, a host of golden daffodils.'

'But they aren't daffodils, they're jonquils,' Mr. Grantham had answered.

But Mr. Tower was undaunted. 'A rose by any other name would smell as sweet,' he said.

With such a person near him, James still had moments of jealousy. During the mornings, while Simon screwed his impatient feet around the legs of a chair and turned pages of geography books under Mr. Tower's languid

direction, James wrote the first chapters of numerous novels and always tore them up before lunch. Then he'd wait on the verandah for Simon : until the moment when Mr. Tower would walk out, flourishing a Greek grammar and saying ' Ah, the glory that was Greece : the pomp that was ancient Rome ' and in the next breath, ' Paying your tribute to rosy-fingered Aurora, Mr. Grantham,' although it was then twelve o'clock.

In the ten or fifteen impatient minutes of waiting, he would fly back to his old unhealthy mood. That man—that tutor idiot with his damnable quotations—was probably wheedling the boy away from him—alienating his affections. He hoped Simon was not learning too much. Those Greeks, fine people of course, but they'd fill the boy's mind with foolish ideas. He remembered his own experience. ' Mens sana in corpore sano,' he said to himself, and bought Simon a punch ball and spring dumb-bells to counteract any decadent influence Greek history might have upon him.

In the afternoons they went for long walks. One day Simon said ' May Mr. Tower come with us ? '

His father said ' No.' He even sent Mr. Tower down to Waihi to buy some books. During this time James did not leave Simon for a second.

All this made only a moment in the story of their life at Karangahake. At the end of the last year Simon said, ' Must old Tower stay

with us for Christmas? It would be better fun if we were alone, by ourselves.'

His father's happiness was complete. He took the boy's hand and they ran along the path; then he abandoned the hand and ran ahead. 'Thirty-six! Thirty-six! Nonsense!'

Simon followed. His father leapt on to the verandah and swung himself into a hammock. At that moment, Mr. Tower appeared. 'Dolce far niente,' he said. But James Grantham ignored him.

'My God, you're a fool,' he said to himself; but he didn't believe it. He was warmed by a fire, hotter than the sun. They were friends. He was becoming more reasonable as a father. He worried less and laughed more and the boy responded, borrowed his father's ties and expected him to share his indigestible liquorice all-sorts. By the time that Christmas of the third year came, and Simon was fourteen, James had drawn a veil over the more gloomy events of the past. He saw Simon in all his young eagerness and strength, standing barefooted on the earth, the muscles in his feet alive with the desire to run. He thought he had overcome his own heavy self-interest—and he had made his son call him by his Christian name. He still remembered the day when they walked up the hill, to a clump of pines, to look down into a green and silver valley. It was then that Simon had said 'Must old Tower stay with us for Christmas? It would be better fun if we were alone.'

He had answered ' Certainly. Where would you like to go? There is no reason why we should stay here. Would you like to go to Auckland or to the country somewhere? I'll do whatever you like.'

There was something feminine in him that enjoyed the resignation of that last phrase, ' I'll do whatever you like.'

If Mrs. Tucker was overlooked in a survey of the household, it was because she was a thinker and not a talker. The retirement of this clement town suited her. Twenty years ago she had been in love with the Captain of a coastal scow. An enlarged photograph of him, in sea-faring cap, his waxed moustaches pointing to a Corinthian column to the left and a palm on a pedestal to the right, had been her solace during the weeks when the ' Stormy Petrel ' was at sea. But he had borrowed her savings and disappeared and Mrs. Tucker, who was Miss Tucker in truth, had closed her heart to all further adventurers. She became a Catholic. She lit the fire with Captain Millet's enlargement and in its place in the green velvet frame with the gold strip, she had placed a lithographed print of Saint Anthony. She took the frame to a shop and had a wooden back nailed on to the Saint, so she could not change her mind.

From then on, Mrs. Tucker became a thinker, and a devout Catholic. ' God 'elp us if the Wesleyans gets the upper 'and, Mr. Grantham,' she had said. She described herself as *a thinker*.

She thought as she cooked, and she placed human beings into two classes. The ' digging a spoon into the dripping ' class, and the ' icing the cake ' class. Mr. Grantham belonged to the ' digging a spoon into the dripping ' variety. He was always analysing and digging, each time deeper than the last, scooping, on and on, deeper and deeper. One day, as she was thinking about this habit of his, she dug the spoon so deep into the dripping jar that it touched the bottom. This started her on to new tracks of thought. If you were like Mr. Grantham (she called him ' Mr. G.' in her thoughts), you'd dig so much, that you'd empty your jar. The possibilities of thinking terrified her at this point and instead, she thought of Simon, who belonged to the ' icing the cake ' class. He just smoothed everything over and didn't worry—' a sort of pat it down and make it nice temperament,' she said to herself.

But she was confused in placing Mr. Tower into his right jar or dish, although it was significant that one day when he was alone, she gave him bubble and squeak. She thought about that too and felt that some day, she really must write a book.

III

James and Simon went to a northern place on the shores of the Manukau harbour, where there were sheep on the hills and bullocks and ostriches on the lowland by the sea. There James possessed his son with all the miserly

certainty he wanted. That wretched man Tower could not walk out and say ' the lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,' or ' Breathes there the man with soul so dead who never to himself hath said " This is my own, my native land." ' There was nobody to divert the boy's affection. James did not resent the interest of the angular, quiet farm women who made ginger wine and who dried plums on great sheets of galvanised iron, in the clearing above the orchard.

Every evening they walked over the fields. In some places by the stream, human bones had been exposed by the erosion of the water ; oysters grew fantastically on the branches of mango trees, where they had settled in the high tides. Rabbit skins were stretched out to dry on the walls of the barn. The sheep were so heavy with wool that when they lay on their backs, they died unless you helped them on to their feet again. Black swans flew away into the sunset. The lower plain was made frightful by the ostriches, strutting, steel-footed sultans. You'd find their big, butter-coloured eggs in the stubble. Lewd farm workers sometimes threw the old ones into the air, two at a time, one against the other, so that they'd smash, and smell abominably. Then the men would laugh and trudge up the hill, to their heavy-breasted women, whose red hands were swollen from washing, chopping, churning and lifting spacious milk cans, in the dairy.

James and Simon usually walked towards

the sea. They talked most of the time : the father probing, questioning, analysing, and suspicious lest the boy should have any feelings or ideas unknown to him, lest he should be developing affection for anything or anybody but himself. ' This boy's my own ; he's my immortality ' he said over and over to himself, so often that he became absurd.

' What do you want to do, Simon ? What d'you want to be ? ' he asked one day. They were lying on the sand. James had deliberately pulled Simon towards him, so that he should feel his head resting against him. When Simon moved restlessly, his father experienced some strange mental sensation. Their closeness gave him a sense of oneness, a realisation of something that had grown out of him but which was still part of him. The idea of his son becoming a separate individual with a mind, purpose, and ambition of his own, would have horrified him.

' What do you want to be ? '

Simon thought for a moment—at least he seemed to be thinking, although his eyes and mind were enjoying heedless adventures on the opposite beach, where some people were bathing.

' I don't know. I don't think I'm clever enough to be any of the important things. I couldn't be a doctor or a lawyer. I haven't got enough brains. Old Tower thinks I haven't any appreciation—that's what he calls it. Is he really clever ? Do all clever people

talk like that—you know—he says " a book of poetry, a glass of wine under a tree " or something like that. If I were clever, would I talk like that? I don't think I'll ever be a great man like that.'

' That's nonsense. He isn't great. But he's all right in his job. You could do anything you wished, but there's no point in going against your own inclinations. You must think about it and we'll talk it all over another time. Would you like to go to England—what about Oxford or Cambridge? '

Simon turned. All he said was ' Oh ! ' He'd never considered an English university as a possibility.

' You must think that over too,' his father added. ' I'm quite willing to go to England with you. It would be as much an adventure for me as for you.'

James had never left the Southern Hemisphere, although he called England *Home* and himself an Englishman.

## CHAPTER II

I

Simon walked down to the beach by himself, one afternoon. The farmhouse had been busy with the clatter-jangle of lunch dishes being washed. He stood at the door and listened to the woman, singing as she whisked her red hands about in the hot water, 'Why am I always the bridesmaid, never the blushing bride.' Then he walked down past the old deserted farm house, with the rubber tree growing up through the ruined kitchen, past the squeaking iron windmill; past twenty sullen bullocks, towards the sea.

He wanted to be alone. The sun was hot. The grass was dry and brittle. The wire of the fence actually burned his hands when he held it up, to pass from one field to the next. Locusts sang; their voices seemed to be dry, crackling, like sun-baked sticks. There was no moisture anywhere; the bullocks hung about the trough, waiting for the farm boy to come and pump them more water. Simon did this for them and they pushed each other with their vast rumps, struggling for first place. The snuffling sound of their drinking ended. Simon continued his walk towards the beach. He wore few clothes.

blue flannel shorts, sandals and a silk shirt; He was very beautiful. He was hot and disarranged and he could feel the heat burning his skin through his thin shirt. He suddenly became conscious of his body. He looked down . . . he was then beside the water . . . and he noticed the sunburned colouring of his own wrists. They had been white in Karangahake. His sleeves were rolled up and he could follow the mark of the sun right up to the elbow, to that inner curve where a blue vein was finely traced. He touched it with his right hand.

There was a faint sound of wings; for a moment he thought it was a dizziness in his own head. But it was the summer singing in the air. The calm water lay in front of him; it touched the sand with the merest ripples. In a veil of visible heat it reached out to the farther shore where there was a flower farm. Men were bent over the great patchwork quilt of colour; there were masses of irises, rich under the sun.

He took off his shirt, threw it on the sand and looked at himself. He imagined his own body lying among the irises; the contact of the petals and the hot earth. He placed his hands against his breasts. His skin was so dry and hot that there was a sort of dust on his body. He took off his shorts and sandals and sat on the beach. He'd bathe soon. The sand was hot. It moved under his weight as if it too were finding a new consciousness. When he lay on his stomach, his beautiful young body

exposed to the sun, he felt sick again. So he turned and watched a cart, full of flowers, drawing out from the garden. He placed his hands again on his chest. The sea rose and fell in front of him ; the iris bed became a purple river and flowed into the water. He leapt up and ran along the beach, naked, in an ecstacy of new consciousness, his bare feet making little showers of sand that fell behind him. He stopped at the edge of the water, swinging his arms around, like a windmill, jumping from one foot to the other. Two women happened to walk along the beach. They saw him : saw him so that they made little screams and turned away. Simon put on his clothes and walked back, up the hill, into his own room. He lay on the bed and saw the red blossoms of the Kowhai tree, hanging like immense blood drops from the branches. Then he ceased to see them, ceased to feel anything, ceased to think ; and very soon he fell asleep.

The women almost ran back to the house. ' I've never seen such goings on in a boy,' Esther Cork told her husband. ' He was there, bare as God made 'im, and in the broad daylight, with not a stitch on 'is back.'

' The wicked little swine.' He cleared his throat, spat into the cold fireplace, and threw his paper aside. ' I'll tell his father,' he said.

He stamped his way to the farmhouse. He was a nasty man, in the fullest sense of the word. He had not forgotten his own childhood.

He thought he was horrified. He was filled with hypocrisies. He was mean and he had no beliefs. Only the husk of prejudice and narrowness remained with him.

He thought of the phrase with which he would acquaint Mr. Grantham with the boy's sin. He liked the words 'sin' and 'sinner.' He had hugged them for many years, labelling people with them but never understanding them. He found Mr. Grantham in the orchard, shaking apples from a tree.

'I feel I've got something I ought to tell you, sir' he said.

'What is it?'

'Well, it's like this. I've had boys of me own and I've been a boy meself and I am actin' as I'd like another to act to me. It's like this, hopin' you'll beg pardon for the crudity.'

'Yes, yes, what is it?'

'Well, my missus and Mrs. Thornton was walking along the beach and they saw your boy running on the sand without a stitch of clothin' on his back.

'Where is he now?'

'I s'pose he's in the house. Don't be too hard on him, sir.'

James suddenly became an acid old man. He brought no intelligence and no genuine feeling to bear on what had happened. He felt only what he supposed he ought to feel; he acted, not on the result of his own pleasant reason, but with inherited intolerance. De-

liberately, he cut a stitch from the walnut tree ; he did so because he knew people always cut sticks from trees when confronted with such a violation.

He stalked to the house, and entered with silly haste. He opened the bedroom door so severely that it swung back against the wash-hand stand and made everything rattle. The noise awakened Simon. He sat up. He saw only his father's eyes and the stick.

II

Simon opened the door. He thought of distance. He wanted distance, great distance between himself and the thing that had happened. There were remote stings upon him. His leg throbbed as he ran. He didn't feel his feet touching the earth ; he ran over the ground towards the pine trees. He rejected the open field and the too candid light between the wattles. The pines were old, shadowy and black. With them, his pace always slackened so that he walked almost nervously on the slippery dead needles. The pines accepted him solemnly and without question. He had often come here during the two weeks at the farm.

He crawled into the hollow where a great buttress root arched itself out of the earth. The pine needles were inches deep ; they were soft and sweet to smell. He pressed his forehead against the bark of the trunk. It hurt him. So he pressed harder to increase

the pain. It made that other pain in his leg less terrible.

He'd go to sea. A pirate, like that black-bearded pirate in 'Chums.' He wanted to hold on to that bearded man, to see his horrible arms, his dagger, and his mad eyes. He thought the mad eyes would lessen their terror and the hairy arms become soft and tender if they knew how great was his sorrow. He wanted to go to an island and live alone; with nothing but birds and trees and sand. He wanted his father to come and look for him in a tall, white-sailed schooner. He wanted to hide, put out his fires and haul down his flag lest they should land and find him. He could never see his father again. He didn't hate him. But the man he'd called James; the man whose hair he'd ruffled and on whose knees he'd sat, was dead. A strange misunderstanding person had taken his place. The day passed. Half darkness spread through the pine trees. Their moan became more solitary and cold.

Simon slept, his heart thumping against the cushion of pine needles, his hands curled up against him. His boy brain said he didn't want to live any more. He wanted to die. But his body was tired. He stirred only when twisted dreams made him shake and move closer in between the loins of the old tree.

James Grantham wandered about, half insane, mumbling, crying on God to strike him dead. He behaved like a fool. Farm hands

and their wives were driven out, with lanterns, to search the bush and fields.

'Find him. For God's sake find him,' he yelled. Down the Gothic arches of the pines they searched. The wives whispered among themselves. 'He's gone mad.' The men were silent. Their lanterns swung against their legs as they carried them. Held high, they illuminated their ugly faces. The pines became an illusory scene of swinging lights, ghostly faces, and sticks, crackling under heavy boots. Down in the fields they searched too, waking the cattle from their ponderous sleep, down even as far as the sea, which was bound to the sand by a ribbon of phosphorus.

A woman found him. She held the lantern down and then she screamed. 'Here he is. Gawd almighty! 'E might be dead for the look on him.' James ran down between the trees. The woman stepped back. Her husband clutched her arm. 'Shut up,' he said. 'Why should I shut up? 'e *do* look as if 'e's dead,' she answered.

James ran so fast that the light in his lantern went out. 'Don't touch him. I'm his father, don't touch him.' They all stepped back; James went down on his knees, picked Simon up and ran back towards the house. The people followed with their lamps, but he ran ahead so quickly, that he stumbled under his burden and fumbled in the dark. At last his groping hand clutched at the door. He opened it, still in the dark, found the bedroom, placed Simon on

the bed and fumbled with the matches. He broke them. When they did light, they fell on the floor. He stamped on them. Candles. He lit two. He held one of them over Simon's face. 'I've been a swine' he thought. He called to him softly. 'Simon, oh, Simon, speak.' Then he locked the door, because the others had come and there was a bunch of stupid faces, gaping. He went back to the bed. Great lumps of candle fat fell on his hands. 'Simon, I love you, my little boy. Oh, forgive me: I'll do anything if you'll speak.' Simon opened his eyes and closed them again.

James shook. His hands twitched. He touched Simon's face. The skin was soft. There seemed to be a million little muscles moving in his throat. How delicate was his neck!

For a moment he took his hands away. He looked at his thumbs. If he lowered them on to that lovely throat, it would all be finished. Simon would never grow up, away from him, into the world.

At this moment, locked in the room, with its heavy bed, its patchwork quilt, its hairpin-lace mats, its corner shelves with beaded fringes, Simon was completely his. Nobody else could touch him. If he put those thumbs down—he looked at them and pressed them together—if he put those thumbs down on to that throat, they'd take Simon's body away, but everything else would remain. He would keep the laughing boyhood of Simon with him for ever

and ever. He stretched his arms out over the bed.

The light was behind him. Simon opened his eyes and saw the two bent thumbs. He screamed, and then he screamed again.

Somebody thumped on the door and shouted, ' What are you doing ? Are you mad ? '

' Go away—leave us alone,' he answered. But they banged still more and threatened to break down the door. Simon sat up in bed and drew himself up against the wall. He was terrified.

' I won't hurt you, my son. Oh, don't look at me like that. I love you, Simon. I won't hurt you.'

But the boy clung to the top of the bed. His open shirt fell back. There was a bruise on his shoulder, a bruise, and a little blood. It had dried and stuck to his shirt while he slept. James saw it. He remembered the walnut stick. He had caused Simon awful pain—Simon whom he loved. He remembered something about each man killing the thing he loved. The coward with a kiss, the brave man with a sword. And he had killed the love in Simon with pain. He wanted to hurt himself. He scratched the back of his hand with the nails of the other. He dug them in. The people kicked the door. Simon sat against the wall and stared. The two candles were on the table. Pain !—That should be his punishment. He held his hands over the candles, in the swaying yellow flames.

Simon screamed again. James was maddened with the pain. He plunged his thumbs down, through the flames, on to the hot wax. The room was in darkness. The lock broke. There was a crash as the door burst back against the wash-hand stand. Simon screamed and sobbed as they led his father out, away to his own bedroom.

III

James went down to breakfast. He had exposed himself, ridiculously, to all these people. If he could be very calm at breakfast, perhaps they'd think their own imaginations had distorted and exaggerated the scene of last night.

Simon was at breakfast before him. They were both silent. Simon left the table before his father. He went to the orchard : where there were fallen red apples, long grass, turkey gobblers, walnuts and old misshapen trees. He picked up an apple, took one bite from it, then threw it at one of the turkeys.

He was not thinking of yesterday. There was nothing to think about. He had made a long long journey and his father was far away, back there on the railway station where he had left him. This was a new place and a lonely place. He'd always be alone here now.

James was watching him from the higher part of the orchard. He walked down. He felt nothing but humility. He had never asked the right to correct Simon. He was a

jealous possessor, not a critical father. Simon had grown overnight. There was a remoteness in his actions. He looked long and angular as he stood there. He turned and saw his father. His eyes remained cold and expressionless. James was afraid of him. 'Simon—are we never going to be friends again—you did not speak at breakfast.' He assumed a fictitious ease by putting his hand in his pocket. The thumb was burned and it hurt him.

'Do you forgive me, oh, Simon, say you forgive me—do you?'

'Yes, father.'

'I was mad, Simon, I wasn't myself, only forgive me and I'll do anything you want.'

'I do. It doesn't matter. I suppose I did wrong.'

But he walked away and left his father standing in the orchard: he went down to the ruins of a cottage: some bees had made their hive in the walls. He watched their endless procession. Busy, untiring, they hurried in and out of a knot-hole in the wood.

## IV

James Grantham put all his weight on his heels and forced them into the earth. Self-control came with the strain. Cold sanity turned him round and made him walk back to the house. He packed his clothes. He wrote a telegram, and through the window he called a farm boy, who took it down to the cramped, galvanised-iron Post Office. He asked for a

horse to be harnessed into the sulky, and while this was being done he wrote a note :

My Dear Simon,

I am going to leave you here alone. My nerves are all wrong, and after I have seen a doctor, I shall go to the harbour heads, to the little farm house you know. I am leaving you some money. You can join me there in two or three days if you wish. If you don't want to come, you can go straight home, by yourself. Mr. Tower will be back, so you won't be alone.

He stopped writing for a moment and in that moment he ceased to be a father instructing his son. He was a man in a great lonely void, with an unreasoning love. He saw his dead wife, moving across space, towards another figure. This was Simon. As they fused into a single, misty conglomeration, he realised what was happening in himself. The two sensibilities, the love he had felt for his wife, and his love for the boy, became one. In this moment he knew that what he had failed to find in marriage, he was now seeking in what the marriage had produced. Simon was his physical son. But he also expected the boy to respond, intellectually and emotionally to every kind of love in himself. It was a love without passion. He never had been passionate. He had never desired the possession of anything or anybody before. But in Simon he saw beauty, which was the symbol of his own youthful love of flowers, the sky, the earth. He saw in him also, the symbol of his own

immortality, the body that would grow to maturity as his own withered away into age.

He knew that when he married, it was not to possess his wife, but to create his son. He remembered when, a month before Simon was born, he was already conscious that, away from the physical manifestation, the boy's mind and spirit were already part of his life.

Now that Simon was fourteen years old, his feeling for him was the same. He resented the fact that a physical agent had been necessary to create him. His love existed on some other plane, away from the earth. It was as if his soul had risen up to an intangible void, where, long ago, it had absorbed the soul of his unborn son. And if he appeared to be a selfish father, miserly and intolerant, this was because the outside world was unable to understand all that had happened within him. He was no ordinary father loving an ordinary son. His love was such that for the first time in his life, he realised what was meant by the phrase 'God the Father.' He felt like a point in a second Trinity. God loved him and he loved Simon. This appeared in his mind in terms of geometry. He saw the immaculate Trinity in the Heavens, and then, the point where that Trinity was linked with humanity, coming down from the old generation into the new, through himself, half-old, developed, mature.

But he did not realise that Simon was a normal boy, with no great imagination, and no inclinations to extremes of good or evil. His

body sprang to adventure and exercise. His mind was honest, clean, decent, all those things, untortured by the curiosity and self-analysis which had kept James in a state of nervous tension ever since he was a boy.

He wrote, at the end of the letter :

> If you forgive me for what I did yesterday, come to me, and we'll play together on the sand.

He put the note and some money in an envelope and placed them on Simon's table.

The trundling sulky travelled down past the pine grove, where they had sought for Simon the night before. Then out on to the dry grey road. James could see the ostriches strutting across the fields. An old, rusty plough was leaning, like a tired skeleton, against a wire fence. School children passed, some of them riding three together, on a lofty friendly horse. They waved to him and he waved back. The sulky passed down the hill towards the river steamer by which he was to make the next stage of his journey, to the harbour heads.

## CHAPTER III

Ruth Hardy had been an important person to James Grantham when he was a little boy. She had lived in a cottage on his father's farm. He remembered her sitting at the door of her house, framed in pink ivy geraniums. There she made most of the clothes worn by the Grantham family. He remembered her, with half a dozen pins held between her lips, bending down to make chalk marks on the trousers she was sewing for him. But she went away to the Manukau and married a fisherman, and the Granthams became rich enough to have their clothes made in Auckland.

Ruth Hardy's house was in a place where the iron-black sand ended, where the shore leapt up to a great hill before it finally sank into the Manukau harbour. Ruth Hardy was a widow. She had been very happy in the four years of her marriage. She came to the little farm house with her box of hemmed linen, and her gold ring, still shining new and strange upon her finger, when she was twenty-four. The verandah of the house faced the sea. The sand, smoothed by the incoming tide, was always black, except in the hot noon when it shone like polished steel. In those early days

the sand had seemed very cruel. While her husband was away in the little boat, she'd sit at the high window and watch the ocean tumbling in upon the beach, and rushing back in a terrified white line, as if even the water was afraid. But Tom would come back in the evening with great bunches of mullet, which he put on the kitchen table, where they stared at her stupidly, and she would forget the black sand and the moan of the discontented sea that swept up to the gate.

They were very happy. Sometimes, as she was lifting the bowl of flowers before she set the table for tea, he'd say, 'Let me take one end, Ruth,' and they'd lay the table together. Just as she was about to put the cups down he'd pull the cloth off again, and she'd pretend to be very angry. But they'd both laugh, and he'd push her into a chair and say 'Sit there, little wife. I'll be the old woman of the house to-night, and do it for you.' They were merry nights, with cups of tea, and toast before bed. They had a gramophone for which they bought a new record each time they went to the town.

There were goldfish swimming in a bowl in the window.

In the winter they sat in the comfortable chairs before the fire, abandoning the big table, and eating their supper from a low stool placed between them.

'Quite Bohemian, like in the book,' Tom once said.

'*Aren't* we Bohemian?' she had answered,

and the very idea of it made them laugh and laugh. But one night they brought Tom back in a fishing boat. He was dead. His eyes were open wider than ever, so wide that when Ruth saw him lifted on to the sand, she ran away to the house. They did not let her see him again, not even when the hideous undertaker came and she heard the noises in the next room. But she stayed on in the little house.

When he was younger, James Grantham went to see her every year. She had become old and mellow. Sorrow had made her generous and thoughtful. It had killed her own happiness. Wanting nothing from life, she gave more to it and to the people whom she served. 'You're like a mother to me,' James had said to her. When he was a boy, he used to take his torn clothes to her to be repaired, and run to her when he bruised his knee or cut his hand. He came to her now with the same feeling of dependence ; but he did not tell her why he needed the rest and quiet of her house. Down in the flagged square, so damp and cool, he saw the Madonna lilies, and watched the sunlight touching the stamens until they shone like gold. He picked a bunch of lilies for Ruth, and put them in a green jug. He moved them from table to mantelpiece and back to the table again, wondering where she'd notice them first. For two days he walked on the beach and climbed the hills. He took books with him. He read *Pride and Prejudice*, then Browning. He read *Saul* again and again,

and it produced positive strength in him. Two or three times he walked down to the little skeleton wharf, which thrust itself out into the sea. Trucks had run there once, and when he wanted to stand on the little platform at the end, above the mad water, he crawled out on the sleepers. In the evening of the second day, a fisherman brought him a telegram from Simon.

'A storm comin' up, sir,' said the man as he handed James the envelope. He threw an old canvas cover over his boat, tied it down and dragged a rheumatic leg up the hill. *Arriving to-night.* James put the telegram in his pocket and walked into the yard. The breeze had strengthened into a wind, and the Madonna lilies were slapping the brick wall. Ruth stood in the doorway.

'The wind'll be the end of these lilies,' she said. They walked out on to the beach. Within a few minutes the sky lost its colour. Black and grey clouds rushed up over the sea. They made a tremendous tent over the world, shutting out the sun. Far, far away, where the sky met the leaden sea, ropes of lightning seemed to hold it down. Ruth went back into the house but James stayed on the sand. There were no ships on the water. Round him the wind was singing. It rose in operatic runs and grey anger came over the face of the water. In the rift between the rocks, the wind came up like a groan in a throat, and the waves rose behind it. The sea seemed to grow. The

breakers which were a smooth line in the day grew up, until they were arches touching the sky. In an hour they had risen until they came rolling in majestically, sweeping over the polished floor of sand to the forsaken line of stray timber and flotsam which they had left, high up on the beach. In the distance they hurled themselves with magnificent thunder against the high immovable cliffs, and fell back in shrieking showers of spray. James crept in against the hill. There was no rain, but the waves shook the earth and drove sheets of spray over the shore so that he was wet. The low clouds mingled with the lofty waves. The thunder was pitiless, on, on persistently, trees bending, logs and timbers cast up and landing, exhausted, prostrate on the sand, only to be dragged back, fought with and thrown up again. The sea grasped at the wharf, made it rock and sway and sprawl and break into a hundred pieces ; then float away like a skeleton, to be thrown high upon the earth. James ran back to the house and shut the door. He went up to his room, dragged the curtains back and watched. On, on came the sea. Down in the kitchen, Ruth was crying with fear. On, on, up over the black sand, lit up by the golden flashes of lightning, on, over the dry earth, over the parched grass, taking the fisherman's boat, juggling with it—laughing at its helplessness, like a child with a toy. On, on, until the fringe of the sea was within three yards of the house. James ran down to the kitchen. 'You must

go, Ruth—you must go—the wind is terrible —it will tear the house to pieces; you must go!' She was stupid and passive. He took her by the arm—put his own coat on her and drove her out of the door. The wind whipped round her and lifted her coat—filled it and carried her out into the storm. 'Go up to the cottage—go up the hill—go up,' he shouted and then tried to close the door, but the wind bound it against the outer wall and it would not move. The storm screamed—screamed. He would stay. Mighty pandemonium—tearing, screaming. The black sand was beaten—the sea had come in to hammer it down, to lick the edge of earth and grass and cover up the blackness of the sand. James went back to the bedroom. The house was shaking—a little boat shed, carried in by the tide, was smashing against the wall. The sea reached up to the shaky little verandah, bound together with the honeysuckle creepers. It rose like a raft on the black water. James watched it from above. He was fascinated by his own danger. He'd stay. He opened the window and the wind yelled with joy at new space to fill. It tore in and dashed the curtains against the ceiling. James leaned out. The wind burned his face. An intangible scene of black—moaning black—blacker than the sand. The sand was defeated by something blacker than itself. He could distinguish nothing of the shrieking hell out there beyond the edge of the garden. He saw the picket fence under the

window become grotesquely entangled with the verandah and dash off in the negroid arms of the sea, jubilant—fearfully jubilant at the adventure. They were tired of baking through the unending summers, as fences and verandahs. They found physical joy in their own destruction. The house shook and groaned before the beating waves. The storm was so near that when the lightning shattered the black, the little house was gay with light. There was a sudden riotous scene of pictures and furniture —then nothing. James watched the waves drive great floating timbers against the weather boards, battering—battering, until the lower ones were torn off and taken into the merciless attack. Crashing, jumbled chaos of broken wood. The water was in the lower rooms. The house would topple and fall and he'd die among the moving mass of sprawling beams and floorboards. The house swayed rhythmically. He'd stay and see it through. He had hated the sand, the far spreading black. The passive sea had hated it too and had thundered in arrogantly to destroy it—to join his house and set up a whirling horror above the calm black floor. He would join in the destruction and be carried out where Tom the fisherman had gone. He watched the weather boards moving. He could just see them—the water was almost around the house now—it was creeping up the rise in the ground which led to the road. Soon it would cover the road and then the house would be surrounded. There

was rain now, steady rain. His clothes stuck to him, they were so wet. The wind was dying, but the waves still rolled up from the beach, grand, broad, sweeping, black, shot with silver, banging against the house. He had strained muscle and nerve in staring out of the window. He strained his eyes against the dark—his strength against the wind. There was glory in this defeat of the black beach. He strained until he was limp and weak. He was not as strong as Simon. With the whimpering wind and the booming, crashing waves, he heard a voice—'Father—James—where are you—we've come for you—James.'

There was stamping outside. He saw people, Simon and a driver with a leather cap, a leather cap shining with rain. He smelled the rubber coat. He saw the lights of a car and he remembered miles of bumping road, night through the windscreen, and the even movement of the wiper on the glass.

When they arrived in Onehunga, they went into an hotel. Outside, the storm had turned the street into a stream. The hotel sign creaked and groaned in the wind. James waited in the hall while Simon went out to the car, and came back. He turned to walk towards the stairs, stopped for a moment and wavered.

Simon ran towards him as he fell, unconscious, on to the floor.

# CHAPTER IV

## I

CAMBRIDGE moved placidly and lazily on the first day of May Week. A steady uninterrupted sun shone down on the grey streets. But most people had escaped from these to the river—rhythm of silent punts, gliding canoes, revolving Japanese umbrellas, young men in flannels, swinging punt poles, pretty girls in summer's first dresses, curled against cushions, sitting up, now and again, to change the records on black portable gramophones.

A musical comedy man might have produced the scene. It moved too easily, too mildly to be natural. A vague dresser in the wings had tied the bows on those pink dresses : a stage manager had sweated to make those boats move out from under the bridge, two abreast. Those immaculate undergraduates were dressed and drilled to a pattern and the magnificent outline of King's Chapel swayed, because it was a piece of painted scenery, moving against a backcloth of perfect blue.

The procession of canoes passed up and down, between the jade banks where lazy people stretched themselves in half-sleep, listening to

the purr of far-away aeroplanes : brilliant dragonflies moving through the blue haze, towards the sun.

In one of the canoes, Simon Grantham sat alone. He was radiant at nineteen. English clothes did not hide his colonial vigour. There was something individual in the swing of his paddle ; in the way his boat moved, more quickly than the others, as if his strength was too vital and positive to succumb to the sleepy ease of the day.

In the other boats, girls sat with their brothers and their brothers' friends. They looked kindly and frankly at the calm friends of their brothers. But the spirit of their smile was different when they turned searching and wondering eyes towards Simon. 'Who is that ? ' they'd ask.

'Oh, I don't know. A colonial from Jesus.'

'Not an Australian ! '

'Oh, Heavens, no. Not as bad as that ! He's a New Zealander.'

'That's different isn't it ? '

'Yes, I suppose so. He seems to be a decent sort of chap.'

If there were two girls in a canoe, they'd supplement the conversation by looking at each other and admitting, in the moment when their eyes met, a romantic hunger, of which they might speak, in the half-hour before sleep, when one flung herself across the foot of the other's bed, kicking off her shoes and becoming confidential.

II

Simon had made one friend in Cambridge. They had rooms in a house in Jesus Lane : undergraduate's rooms, no more, no less. The light was in the centre of the sitting room, one nude, stark globe which made a horizon of light-meeting-shadow, around the walls. When Simon knocked the globe as he swung his arms, it swayed and made the horizon of shadow move, like waves on the sea. The chairs were against the wall, as if they were waiting for the members of a committee to arrive at any moment. The pictures were at everlasting war with the outlines of large paraquets whose beaks and bodies and tails were cut, broken, interrupted, by the frames. In these were two hunting scenes, Delysia in tights, and ' The Cocktail Girl,' in three colours, double page, out of the *Tatler*, with the two spike holes, one in her face and one in her middle. The sofa in Simon's room was humped and old, and sometimes, in the evening, it looked like a big, wide woman, lying grotesquely on the floor, in drunken sleep ; as if you might touch her shoulder, as if she'd stand up, slowly and heavily, and say ' I'm ungainly, God alone knows, and I'm broad in the hips, but I can cook.'

The opening of the friendship between Simon and Ralph Alveston was slightly dramatic. Their contact was crystalised in the moment when Alveston came back one Sunday

morning, after a 'binge' in London. The word was his. It was the sort of word that rattled about in his mind. He came in and sat on the foot of Simon's bed. Four vague figures followed him; his confederates, with last night's drink making their faces look like oiled silk, stretched over wire frames.

Ralph laughed before he spoke. 'Grantham, old man, we've been up in London all night, and I've been with my first woman. We all got blind as owls. Old Leather Guts there picked up some girls at the "Forty-Three" and we went back with them. God, we were tight, weren't we?' He turned and directed this last question to his friends. 'Grantham, don't look like old Bramwell Booth there, sitting up in your pink pyjamas. You must come with us next time.'

Then the room emptied. The four ghosts of the night before thumped down the stairs and left Simon and Alveston alone.

'You're very glum,' Alveston said. 'Are you shocked?'

He was a small, nervous boy, with quick eyes, and a perpetual smile. Simon got out of bed and walked over to him. He kicked him, violently, on the behind.

'That's for being a cheap cad,' he said.

Alveston turned on him. 'What the devil are you doing, you interfering swine? I'll knock your head off.'

'Oh, no, you won't, because I'd knock your head off first. I am just punishing you for

being a cheap cad. It isn't going with a woman that matters. It's *how* you go, and that way is filthy. That's one thing I hate about you English. You think I'm a crude colonial, but at least I don't look on virtue as a one-sided affair, to be expected of girls and not of chaps. What's sauce for the gander is sauce for the goose. We've been in these digs together for three months and that gives me the right to demand something of you. Since you've shown decent instincts up to now, I am going to see that you don't play the cheap cad again ; so I am going to kick you in the pants once more and then I'll dress and we'll go out to lunch.'

Alveston was kicked again. He was so completely amazed by Simon's calm, deliberate manner that he stood still, wide-eyed, and did not retaliate.

'You think I'm mad because I do what I want to do. I don't do the same things as all the English people about me. I don't act to pattern as you do. I don't accept the community standard for myself. I work out my own standards. I was ashamed of being a colonial the first few weeks I was here, but I'm proud of it now.'

'Oh, you shouldn't say that. Everybody thinks you're a hell of a good fellow,' interrupted Alveston. He was overwhelmed by a new admiration for Simon. He did not resent his punishment. Everything was positive about Simon. He moved his head, he opened a door,

he spoke, he judged with a sureness that made Alveston feel weak, secondary, negative.

So they went out to lunch and as they turned towards the Lion, Simon took Alveston's arm and said, 'We understand each other better now and that is always worth a kick on the tail, whether you are the kicker or the kicked. You've got to make one end suffer to benefit the other. I think you're pretty good as chaps go. You see, I made up my mind about you a few weeks ago and when you let yourself down by going with a common tart, you let me down too, because I've been wrong in my judgment of you. And I hate being wrong.'

Simon leaned one hand on the wall then and knocked his pipe against his boot. It seemed to Alveston that he filled the entire street. He used the whole street as his setting. He had that sureness in his walk which made him win in the strange mind-tussle which goes on between taxi-driver and pedestrian as they compete for possession of a space in a road.

They lunched richly, with wine and two glasses of port, and then, heavy with good eating, they went back to their rooms and slept in their arm chairs. Simon was asleep first and Alveston watched him. Simon's hair was a self-willed mop. It hung in lumpish waves over his forehead. His face was heavy, except for his mouth which was sensitive, questioning. His hands were big and strong, but his wrists were delicate and fine. His eyelashes lay on his cheeks when he slept.

Alveston watched him and said to himself, ' That's the type of chap I'd like Delphine to marry.' Delphine was his sister. Then he too went to sleep, sliding down into the chair until he was almost sitting on his shoulders.

From this time their intimacy extended to generous candour. Alveston told Simon about Delphine. ' No end of a sport, out-of-doors, damned pretty, most people say. You'll like her.'

She was coming for May Week. Simon (oh, yes, he had become Simon. One day he was Dear Old Simon), yes, Simon must meet her. They'd make one party and go to things together. Lady Alveston was told about Simon, Lady Alveston who had headaches, in the South of France, in Algiers, in Scotland, and in New York, where a Jew insulted her in a hotel lounge.

' I must speak to you, you're so damned attractive,' he had said. She was thirty then.

' Sir,' she had answered, ringing for the manager with the right hand. She had returned to England two boats earlier than she had intended. She had been ' so upset.'

Yes, Ralph had told her about Simon. She'd answered ' Include him in things if you think it suitable. But I hope he's not a Jew. But then you did say a Catholic—I remember now. Your grand-aunt turned Catholic, so I suppose it's all right. A Colonial ! Dear Ralph, I remember the Australians in the war, setting fire to things and singing a dreadful

song about a very undesirable woman who came from Roubaix, or was it the next town, Armentières? Dear me, I forget everything. He isn't like that, I hope. But you are discriminating, aren't you? Then New Zealanders *are* different, aren't they? They always have a Conservative Government, so I suppose your Simon Grantham must be a gentleman. But you must be careful for Delphine's sake. Girls are not the same as . . .'

Then she felt herself becoming old and priggish, so she crossed out 'Girls are not the same as. . . .' and added 'I'm sure we'll all like him.'

Ralph Alveston was a pool upon which Simon breathed, like a wind. Ralph's response just escaped being abnormal. His mean beginning, his instinct to 'paint the town red,' his drab talk of London, a car at sixty miles an hour, a good dinner, a night of it, all died away. At first he was afraid of Simon's judgment. Then, when the full character of his friend shone before him, he was ashamed of himself. Now he had too many other interests. Simon never gave him a moment of escape from his enthusiasm. There were forty-eight hours in his day. His mind leapt and danced. New plans! New ideas! It was Simon who gave that egg and bacon breakfast in their rooms, asking a tired Italian diplomat, the policeman on duty, a sailor in uniform who happened to be passing the door, four other undergraduates and the five principals of the musical comedy company

that happened to be in the town. And it had gone with a swing. Every time one of them became self-conscious or nervous, Simon had pushed a frying pan into their hand and said, 'Go into the kitchen and fry an egg.'

The policeman had recited parts of Dan McGrew and the tired Italian diplomat had singed his eyebrows, making toast before the kitchen fire. The sailor had spread himself: he had told the musical comedy star about his mother; how he picked cowslips every year for her, when he went home on leave to their house near Horsham, and how she made cowslip wine from them. 'It always pleases the old girl,' he said. And the musical comedy star almost cried and she wrote the recipe for the cowslip wine down on a piece of paper, 'in case.' Only Simon could have given such a party.

The woman in charge of the rooms would have sold her soul for him. On the morning when she was red-eyed, after quarrelling with her husband about nothing at all, Simon talked to them 'just like a Dutch uncle' and made them kiss and be friends and brought them a cold chicken and sent them to a theatre together. 'And they took it like lambs,' said Alveston afterwards. 'The whole house worships you, Simon.'

Simon picked him up then and threw him on to Auntie Bell. Auntie Bell was the heavy-hipped sofa.

III

Simon dug his paddle into the river, ferociously. The action was startling. It disturbed the even gliding parade of boats. Everybody looked at the little canoe that moved into the bank. Simon stayed there for a moment.

'Delphine and Simon,' Ralph said to him. 'You'll love Delphine,' he said, casually, with no profound meaning attached to the middle word. And Simon found himself wanting to love Delphine. That his want was less personal than this; that he merely wanted to love *somebody*, did not occur to him. But being a person without abstractions, (*a*) He wanted to love. (*b*) He was to meet Delphine at tea, at five o'clock. (*c*) He wanted to love Delphine. He chose this odd moment to let his mind fly to recollection of his experience, over the past six years.

Then, like a bird leaving the earth, flying through space, his mind flew back. He got on to that terrible train with his father. The doctor said to him 'You must be very patient.' Simon remembered it all, the doctor's house with its white paint and its green blinds and the well drilled lines of red geraniums. The stiff waiting room, with the Highland cattle and the old *Punches*, with their covers torn. 'You must be very patient with him. I won't say there is no hope. Indeed, there is every hope that with a few years' quiet, under

proper conditions, he'll regain his control . . . his (the doctor fumbled with the word) sanity.' They walked down the hill together after that, down the steep hill, past the factories and the women, into the city. It was the lunch hour and the women lounged against the doors and talked in loud voices. And all the time the doctor talked to him. 'You need not fear for yourself. All this is because of something that has happened since you were born. It's a repression, a sex repression that has done it. At least that is what I think. Perhaps a year, perhaps two years will see him all right again. These cases, you know—' and he talked on and Simon saw nothing, heard nothing definitely; all he thought of was a mad man, with a foaming mouth, his bloody hands beating a stone wall. It took him four days to reduce this phantasmagoria to the dimensions of truth. His father was *nervous*. That was the kindest word one could use. It was essential that he should go into a *nursing home*. These also were kind words. Simon learned to reject the word asylum. That first picture! A room full of the half-mad people, their eyes askew, their hands coarse, twitching of necks, kaleidoscopes of strange ideas, tumbling into shape in their heads, changing, twisting. And perhaps, down the long, straight, stone corridors, the screams of a maniac tearing his own flesh, in his cell. For hours that picture swung in front of him.

'You must not exaggerate this in your own mind,' the doctor said at one point. So he saw

his father then, as an older man, quiet, with a sad expression—a thin man, sitting in the sun, in a chair, a nurse hovering near him. His slow suspicious hands extending, to move things on a small table. Simon brought this picture to England with him.

'You'll stay with me, Simon,' his father had said. His hands were on the boy's sleeve. Already they were thinner and there was a twist and an unphysical airiness in the way they moved.

'They won't make me stay without you Simon, my Simon.' For a moment he was excited. 'Hide my thumbs, Simon. Always my thumbs have done it, Simon. See, if I hide them in my hands, they can't be seen. Do people look at my thumbs?'

He lifted up his hands and extended them. Simon remembered the night when his father stood over him, when he put his hands down on the hot candles. The shadows of his thumbs moved over the boy's face again. 'Do they look at my thumbs?' he asked him. Then he put his hands down. He closed his fingers over his thumbs and smiled at them.

In front of the house . . . they asked Simon not to come in. 'It is better,' the doctor had told him. In front of the house, Simon had smiled wonderfully. 'Daddy—James, I must go now. I'll be back very soon. I think you'll like this place. It's a jolly view. Goodbye, Daddy.'

James Grantham looked at the view, when

Simon swung his hand out like that 'It's a jolly view.' He saw the points of the hills and the sweep they made before they came down, to be tied together with this bunch of trees and thicket and houses. He cried a little. 'You won't come back, Simon.' Then he walked away, towards the house. It was easier than they had expected. But his face was sad no longer. It was impassive, as he walked up the steps, twitching his hands, and drawing the fingers, tighter, tighter, over his thumbs.

. . . The bird flew back to earth again.

Simon emerged from the recollection, into the immediate scene of boats and the sounds of the insistent gramophones. But they moved behind a mist; his mind had lowered a thin curtain over everything that was near. The thundering yesterdays rose before him and swamped him. He walked a hundred yards, over the grass, before he completed the great circle into space. 'Simon and Delphine,' he said. 'Delphine and Simon. You'll love Delphine.'

## IV

In the first ten years of marriage, Sir Graham Alveston spent most of his time abroad, 'shooting things.' Lady Alveston described him thus. Many of her contemporaries died, still wondering why the bluff, cheerful Sir Graham had married her. 'Of course she *was* pretty,' they said. They turned over *The Times* again to read 'Sir Graham Alveston

sails for West Africa on Friday next, on a shooting expedition during which he will make special attempts to capture a live gorilla for the Blackpool zoo.'

He had shot everything there was to be shot. Their house in Cumberland reeked of stuffed animals and the walls were hideous with heads and tusks and cases of birds. 'A nightmare, my dear! Don't marry a shooting man. He is away half the year and when he is home, I am doing nothing but paying for the freight on these things. And they're so heavy.'

'That? Oh, I don't know. A bison, is it, or one of those things that jump like young girls. A gazelle, yes, a gazelle. I'm sure.' Then she'd call for Ralph. 'Ralph, is this a gazelle?'

'No mother, it's an antelope.'

'Dear me, and me married to a shooting man. But you can't know *all* the animals, can you?'

'She's got a mind like the inside of Willy Clarkson's shop,' said a young man who met her once. But nobody laughed because they didn't know what the inside of Willy Clarkson's shop was like.

## V

'Good afternoon, Mr. Goodwood. Ralph has told us so much about you.'

'His name isn't Goodwood, mother. It's Grantham.'

'Yes, yes, of course, I'm so bad at names.

Forgive me Mr. Grantham. I knew somebody with your name ; the Granthams who were our neighbours in Surrey, you remember, Ralph.'

' Their name wasn't Grantham, mother.'

' Dear me, wasn't it ? Never mind, it *did* begin with G and that's good for me, isn't it, Delphine ? ' Then she laughed. ' And you come from New Zealand. Well. But I suppose you were English once, weren't you, Mr. Grantham ? Somebody must have made New Zealand at first, taken things there and all that. Pioneers. Dear me ! Yes, you must have been English to begin with. I couldn't bear to think of anybody who wasn't English somehow, could you, Mr. Grantham ? Now you'll think that very parochial of me. Or is it *insular* ? Which is the word, Delphine ? But I'm not. I've travelled a great deal. But I hate overseas, don't you, Mr. Grantham ? But, of course, you were born in it.'

' Shut up, mother,' said Sir Graham.

' Am I talking too much ? Dear me.'

Then, Simon was introduced to Delphine. Ralph had written to her, ' You'll love Simon.' He had said to Simon, ' You'll love Delphine,' and they were actually conscious of this entanglement as they shook hands.

' My dear Ralph, what have you arranged ? You just run your poor mother off her middle-aged feet. When I was in Algiers, or was it Marseilles, never mind. When I was in whatever place it was, Mr. Grantham, I walked

twenty miles, with nothing to eat but a Chelsea bun. I was young then.'

Lady Alveston sat down and Sir Graham took the floor.

'Now then, young fellow-me-lad, what is the programme? Haven't you got a drink in this wretched room? Where is the Scotch? Grantham, do you drink?'

'Yes, sir,' answered Simon.

'Good,' said Sir Graham, 'we'll get drunk together. I hate all this bloody—'

'Graham!' said Lady Alveston, fumbling for her smelling salts.

'Sorry, mother,' he answered, 'but where is the Scotch?'

Whisky was poured out for him.

Delphine and Simon talked in the corner, with a mute on both mind and voice.

'Mr. Grantham,' Lady Alveston interrupted. 'I had a cook who settled in Tasmania. You must know her. She was a wonderful cook. Graham, shall you ever forget her beef olives? Sir Graham could live on beef olives, Mr. Grantham. But is Tasmania near New Zealand or not? I am not good at maps. I can never find anything on them, except Gibraltar and the Isle of Wight. Dear me, I hate the Isle of Wight. Don't you, Mr. Grantham?'

'I've never been there, Lady Alveston,' Simon answered.

'Shut up, mother,' said Sir Graham.

'Am I talking too much, dear me.'

'Never marry a woman,' said Sir Graham.

'They do nothing but chatter.' He poured himself out another drink. 'Ralph, you can look after your mother and Delphine. Grantham and I are going to get drunk.'

'Graham, you can be so very vulgar! Mr. Grantham, take no notice of him. You'll dance with Delphine. Delphine dances wonderfully, doesn't she, Ralph? Heaven knows she ought to, with that nasty little teacher coming twice a week. What a man! My dear Mr. Grantham, he used scent. I hate a man to use scent, don't you. Although one can get such cheap scent in Paris. I smuggled some across in my muff, from France. But I can't stand the French. I read one of their novels once. Never read French novels, Mr. Grantham. Promise me that.'

'I promise,' said Simon.

They collected themselves, and under a shower of Lady Alveston's chatter, they arranged to meet for dinner, before the ball.

'Come early and get drunk with me,' said Sir Graham as he went down the stairs.

'Don't be late, Mr. Grantham. I can't stand people being late. Once when I dined with the Crown Pr—' and then her voice became one with the clatter of the door and the space of the street.

Delphine Alveston was not intelligent. But her fresh prettiness and eager, feminine attack made Simon nervously conscious of her, all through the week of incessant fun. They danced on the first night and they were drawn

together in the atmosphere of awnings, lanterns on the river, iced coffee and the warm, coloured, tuneful ballroom. Their mutual attraction was not different from what happened in the meeting of every other youth and every other girl on the dancing floor. But it is the illusion of everyone in the street that an uncommon glow surrounds him; that his hopes and thoughts and interests are awful high, withdrawn from those of the human mass with which he sweeps gloriously forward. Simon felt this difference. Delphine resigned herself to him when he put his arms about her to dance. She saw other people turn to look at him. His hands had been shy of her at first but the shyness passed and they held her close enough for her to be conscious of his height and the vast safety of his shoulders and arms. The smile on her face was cheap, her exultation was silly. But she was effectively pretty in a pinkish, fluffy dress, with four white gardenias, pale as milk, near her shoulder. She was a crumpling, delicate, breakable possession—this Simon felt as he held her. He was heavy and awkward. Self-conscious. He was afraid of her. The singing room seemed to be swarmed with coloured birds flying about him. The next day on the river, when she lay back, a straw hat making a chequer-board pattern of shadows on her neck, she watched him as he moved, high above her, lifting the pole and lowering it into the next stretch of water. He took the punt up, under bridges which sent

bars of cool shadow across them, and then into the open again. The green banks dotted with white, lazy, sleeping people. She was so certain. But there was no depth in her certainty. It asked 'Am I pretty?' 'Am I being amusing?' 'Lying like this, do I look as if I am worth winning, yet as if I'd take a lot of winning, yet not so much winning that I'd tire anybody's courage and ardour? I'd know when to give in. The very last moment.' And she played on an old theme in her mind, for her imagination moved about a picture of Cleopatra, exotic, upon a sofa; Camille, dramatically attractive, also upon a sofa.

Now and again Simon looked at her and smiled. His smile was generous. It had no twist of duplicity: there were great spaces and hills in his smile; wind rolling down on to the water, a broad valley with a splendid river flowing in to the sea. That is how he expressed himself. Delphine gave herself niggardly, meanly, as drops of scent fall from a *vinaigrette*.

Lady Alveston was waiting for them on the bank. She was picking little pieces of pollen from her skirt when they came up to her. 'Mr. Grantham, we must have tea. Come. And I know it'll be dreadful tea. I only once ever tasted good tea. The Rothschilds'. They had it brought specially from China. But I can't bear Jews. Do you have Jews in New Zealand? It was King Edward who started the taste for them. But then he did so many silly things, not that I'd be disloyal. I

hate disloyalty. Playing all those German songs during the war and Wagner at the Opera. I can't see the slightest reason why we shouldn't have British music, can you ? ' Then she said ' Can you ? ' again, so that Simon was obliged to answer. ' No, certainly not.' His mind fidgeted. He wasn't certain if he should have said ' Yes.'

Delphine walked behind them, with her father.

' Grantham, we must have a Scotch. I'll die if I don't have a Scotch. What do you say to one, my young fellow-me-lad ? '

' Certainly, sir.'

Lady Alveston took Simon's arm over an uneven place, leading to some steps. ' I am so bad with steps, Mr. Grantham. You must help me. I am always nervous with steps. Ladders. I saw a gardener fall from one once, and he fell on to some shears and cut his arm. The sight of it made me ill. I cannot look at blood. I think of it still when I pass a butcher's shop. So revolting, don't you think, all that meat ? They should have had it hidden, like those nice tailors' shops in Saville Row. Screens, wire things you know, with the name in gold. But perhaps you are like Sir Graham. He won't go to Saville Row. Says it is an inquisition, or is it iniquity ? I don't know. I get my words muddled. Ralph says I use too many. But boys are so rude nowadays. You are not modern, are you, Mr. Grantham ? I hate moderns. Parents are too easy now. They

should be like Queen Victoria. A marvellous Queen, Mr. Grantham. I met her riding in a what-do-you-call-it on the Riviera once. But she was hard. A stickler for form. But I like form, don't you, Mr. Grantham? Form in one's life. Everything in its place. Sir Graham is like that. I think that's what drew us together in the first place.'

Delphine called out to her. 'Mother, you are not letting Mr. Grantham get in a word.'

'Am I talking too much? Dear me, Mr. Grantham, stop me if I am. But you are such an interesting listener. Dear me, here we are. I am sure we'll all have indigestion. I am sure they use egg powder in the cakes. That yellow is not genuine egg, if I know anything. Still, it's a holiday, I suppose. Ralph, you take Mr. Grantham up and find a table while Delphine and I powder our noses.'

Then, as an afterthought, 'Mr. Grantham, you must come to us in Scotland in August. Ralph will fix it all up. I am so bad at dates. You will come, won't you? Come when you like. It is all very picnic. We are not Jews, you know, with oceans of money. *Nouveaux pauvres*, and all that. *Gueux comme un rat d'église*. That's what I am. But you will come in August, won't you?'

'Thank you, it's awfully good of you. I'd love to come,' Simon replied.

'Then that's settled. Delphine, we'll give him the lily-of-the-valley room—plenty of sun. He'll want sun, coming from the tropics. The

tropics must be wonderful, except for the boa constrictors. I saw a book on them once. August then—Delphine, Delphine, to our vanities. We women must have our vanities, Mr. Grantham. You'll not deny us that ! '

' Certainly not, Lady Alveston.'

' Ah, a diplomat.' She smiled.

' Delphine,' he had said on the last day, when the sun was vague, so that it made no stretches of burning light between the trees. ' Delphine, I love you, my sweetheart. I cannot wait until August.'

She curled herself into a heap, the waves of her frilled, pale blue linen skirt making a sort of shell in which she lay.

' Do you love me, Delphine ? '

She looked at him. He stood at the end of the punt. If he fell from where he was, he'd crush her. She closed her eyes. Some strange, almost foreign depth of truth stirred in her. She almost said ' Yes, and I love you, Simon.'

But a mean smile passed over her face.

' I wonder,' she said.

' You are cruel, Delphine.'

But still she smiled, lying back, watching him. Immense, he seemed, with his arms bare to the elbows, swinging the long pole, his body moving, like a tree in the wind.

## CHAPTER V

### I

Day after day, through the rich summer, James Grantham sat on the verandah of the long, flat New Zealand bungalow. If a child had thrown a ball from the house, it would have rolled down an unbroken slope of green hillside, a thousand feet, into the river. Seven grotesque old willows sheltered the boat landing and sheep lived on the opposite hills. There were little tufts of wool caught on the barbed wire. They made the fence look like a row of white feathers, trembling on silver strings.

He had watched this landscape for five years. Every week the doctor came ; in the summer he walked up the hill, in the winter he came in a car, and his leather bag swished against his waterproof coat, as he walked up the steps.

'How are you to-day?' he would ask.

'Better, thank you, doctor.'

During the first years the doctor accepted the answer for what it was worth. But, gradually, he saw that the once restless eyes looked at him more calmly. James Grantham's fingers no longer danced on the verandah railing when he talked. He lost the habit of passing his hands across his face, when he was

thinking. When Simon had left there, he was not interested in the river and the hills. Day after day he sat there, rubbing his thumbs on the verandah railing, until they were white from the dry, powdered paint. Sitting thus, he would close his eyes and see nothing but the great sea coming in, the black house, and his hands, drawing their shadows over Simon's face.

Once they found him with his thumbs bandaged in two handkerchiefs. 'They've got blood on them,' he said. But when they untied the bandages and showed him that his hands were clean, he nodded, smiled and never mentioned them again. The drama of the storm passed from his memory and he watched the immediate stretch of hills, the sheep browsing in the calm shadows under the trees, or nosing the tufts of tussock by the river : the little Maori girls descending into the bush to pick kidney fern and linen flowers. When the prospect ceased to interest him ; when the Maori boys in their canoes had passed the bend in the river and the little steamer had landed the rattling milk cans on to the wharf, he would close his eyes, tight, and see magnificent patterns of pink carnations moving across purple fields, gold-rimmed pools with white lilies floating on blue water, forked lightning, darting across a saffron sky and irridescent triangles of flame falling into a turquoise sea. He would sit thus for an hour or more and enjoy the

changing patterns, created within his tightly-closed eyelids.

Simon wrote to him every week. Sometimes they did not give him the letters. During the first year they were opened and read to him. Then he was allowed to read the letters himself, after the nurse had torn open the envelope and scanned them. 'He must not read anything to upset him,' the doctor told her.

Now he received his letters from the postman's hands.

Simon wrote, 'You will love Cambridge when you come here. In the summer it's just as warm and there is just as much fun as at home. I hope it won't be long before you *do* come.' James Grantham showed this letter to the doctor. The doctor smiled and next week he came to the bungalow with a friend who stayed to lunch. The friend was a specialist from Wellington. They had talked about James Grantham as they walked up the hill.

'Odd that his trouble should centre around his thumbs.'

The specialist answered, 'Oh, I don't know. I have a fantastic theory about it—you know that one of the most primitive instincts in a man is to hold his hands tensely in the air when he is in a temper—extend his hands you know—as if he were going to choke somebody—the person with whom he is angry—I suppose it's an inheritance from the earliest time—when man had no weapons.

His anger poured out through his thumbs. To choke was his defence.'

'I have found that some people, criminals, hide their thumbs in their palms if you stare at them. If he thought of choking the boy, as you say, I suppose the instinct was awakened in him. And it has to die again, slowly. When he forgets his thumbs, he may be quite normal again.'

Another week passed and when the doctor came on the Tuesday afternoon, with a *Spectator* and a *Country Life* for him, he said, 'Do you want to sail for England in April? Doctor Drissold whom you met last week is going on the Orama and I thought you might like to go at the same time. Your boy would meet you in England of course. I'd write and tell him all about it.'

From this day James completely changed his habits. He had a map sent up to him from Wellington. 'I must have new clothes,' he said. He discriminated between fashions, he read reviews of the new books, he walked down to the river almost every day and once the doctor came, and said, 'Would you like to motor back to Wanganui with me and stay the night? There is a theatre. It might amuse you.'

Thus James Grantham was going back into the world of affairs and action. His calmness baffled the doctor. He had developed a lofty repose. He spoke more slowly and less self-consciously, and old aggravations, which had

persisted up to the fourth year of his life in the hills, completely disappeared.

'I am coming to you, Simon,' he wrote. His letter reached Simon at the same time as the letter from the doctor. They were on the table as he came down to breakfast one August morning, in Scotland.

'Odd stamps. They're New Zealand,' somebody said, handing him the letters.

'I come from New Zealand,' Simon answered. He hurried out on to the terrace with the two envelopes, running a pencil along the top of them.

DEAR GRANTHAM,

The time has come when it is quite safe, and indeed advisable that your father should join you in England. You have so often expressed your faith in what I am doing, that I am not going into unnecessary details of the progress of your father's health. Sufficient it is that the last two years have shown him almost completely recovered. Only my care not to exaggerate in the slightest detail makes me add 'almost.' He is a calmer man than in the days when I came to see you at Karangahake. The specialist from Wellington agrees that the time has come for him to return to his old interests and habits. I have put off this event perhaps longer than necessary, because I did not want to upset your career at Cambridge with a responsibility.

I do not advise London of course. It is a great call on your unselfishness, but I would suggest that when he arrives with Doctor Drissold, who will sail on the same steamer, you take him to some place near Cambridge, where

you can visit him. You have a car, haven't you? If he could have a garden, plenty of books and a house that needed some attention, something to interest him, I think you will be doing all you can for him. You must not have an excessive idea of his illness. You must not display nervousness when with him, because he will detect it and worry about you.

I used to explain his trouble with many abstract ideas and words, but these are confusing to the lay mind. I think that affection will be his salvation now and your own unselfish character will, I know, provide that affection for him. His feeling for you is one of idolatry. You must not treat him as your senior. There must be no gap between you in interests. And you must not mind my advising you in such detail.

Never in any way draw his attention to his thumbs. He has not been caught looking at them or worrying about them for more than three years now. His recollection of that scene which you described to me seems to have passed, as far as one can tell. I would profess complete ignorance of what he is talking about if ever he mentions it again. His thumbs represented the peculiar centre of his mental trouble. Why, I cannot tell.

And so the letter went on, with long paragraphs about the arrangements for James Grantham's sailing in April of the following year.

His father's letter pacified Simon. It was short and unexcited.

'All this silly gap of years is going to be forgotten, Simon. I shall be very much afraid of

you, my boy. That snapshot you sent me reveals a giant, perhaps taller than myself, able to spank me. I must behave myself, I suppose, and do as you tell me. I feel just like what you must have felt, going to England for the first time. I am as happy as a sandboy and, in the last five months, I've put on eight pounds in weight. So I may be able to beat you in girth if not in length.'

A tennis ball hit Simon on the head. He looked out, over the loch. It didn't come from there. Then he looked up and saw Delphine at her window. 'Wait for me, I'm coming down to breakfast.' She glanced to the right and left, then into the room, looked out again, put her mouth to the palm of her hand, kissed it and blew the kiss down to him. He caught it, in both hands, threw it into the air, caught it again and put it against his heart.

Simon was anxious and unselfish. Neither his dead mother nor his neurotic father were explanations of his character, which was direct, wholesome and normal. His father's tormented brain had been a mystery to him. In the earlier years, he had not loved his father, because the limits of his boyhood imagination did not allow him to understand the nervous tension of the older man's life. He had often been repelled by his father's dramatic outbursts of affection. But he was older now and a radiant smile revealed his entire character—a smile which showed that he had rigorous standards of conduct for himself, but a tender, understanding sympathy for deficiencies in

other people. He was neither revolted nor disappointed : he was concerned now that this new responsibility was thrust upon him. The way in which he had greeted Delphine when she hung her head over the balcony had been half mechanical. He was thinking of a small house near Cambridge, of his duty, of the considerations and attentions with which he'd have to surround his father. The doctor had said, ' He needs to be loved.' Simon knew that he was capable of the detailed care his father would need. He had been given a problem and it would solve itself, calmly. If there was the slightest disturbance of that calm ; if any faint ripple passed across the surface of the water, it was because of Delphine. He met her at the bottom of the stairs. ' Good-morning, Delphine.'

' Hullo ! Had breakfast ? No ! I can see you haven't.'

They went in and lifted the silver lids of the dishes. Lady Alveston did not come down to breakfast, but her place in the conversation was taken by Mrs. Brandon Gall, of Long Island and New York.

' Mr. Grantham, have kidneys. They're too delicious for words.' This she belied by talking vigorously all through breakfast. There was Lord Truedale who had shot big game with Sir Graham Alveston in Rhodesia. He was tall and thin and looked like a compass. He did want to say, ' You remember that morning when we rode back into Bulawayo, Alveston.'

But Mrs. Brandon Gall left no gaps in the conversation into which he could creep. So he resigned himself to his bacon and eggs. Sir Graham managed to say, 'Sleep well, Grantham?' But for the most part, he hung, silent, over his breakfast of large slices of cold, pink ham, rusks and sherry and hot water.

'Mr. Grantham, bring your kidneys next to me,' said Mrs. Brandon Gall. 'And then I am going to be most firm with you and make you help me with my crossword puzzle. It is *très difficile. Je suis incapable.* I cannot think of an angel of fire in six letters. And who wrote *The Stain on the Carpet*? Was it dear Sir James Barrie?'

'I don't think so, Mrs. Gall. It sounds rather gory for him, doesn't it?'

'Yes, I suppose you are right. Barrie has such imagination, he is so much in the clouds: too much so sometimes. But such psychology. I always think he and Sir Bernard Shaw should collaborate. What a divine play they'd write together. The bitter truths of the one tempered by the imagination of the other. What do you think, Sir Graham?'

'Haven't read either of them, Mrs. Gall. I am not a highbrow.'

'Oh, just listen to that, Mr. Grantham. He says that we are highbrows.'

'No, I didn't. Grantham isn't a highbrow, are you, young fella?'

'No, sir. I am afraid I'm an ignoramus.'

Mrs. Brandon Gall drew the marmalade towards her. 'Oh, don't say that, Mr. Grantham. You read that wonderful Thomas Hardy. What psychology! You know, we have a Thomas Hardy Society in New York. Mrs. Vornheimer Tree, who has that perfectly delightful house at Newport—her husband is the most famous bladder specialist in New York: well, she gave a prize for the member who could enumerate the largest number of Mr. Hardy's female characters, from memory. Oh, we love Hardy in New York. But he is cynical sometimes. Now I always say that if Gilbert Frankau had only written the last chapter of *Jude the Obscure*, it would have been a great book. And Galsworthy—he's marvellous too. You must read *The Silver Spoon*, Delphine. It is wonderful to be born with *The Silver Spoon* in your library.' At this she burst into a peal of lonely laughter. 'Ha-a-a-a-rur-rur-ha-a—that's not so bad for breakfast, is it, Mr. Grantham? When I sat next to Cosmo Hamilton at a lunch party in my *appartement* in New York, he said I was America's epigramophone. Now, he's a wonderful man! What he knows of women's psychology! I was quite afraid of him. But I love meeting lit-er-ary people. Especially those of the *ancien régime* like Thomas Hardy. I can't tell why they haven't knighted him. I went all the way to Dorset to see him lay a foundation stone once. I walked five miles my dear, *à pied*. And he auto-

graphed a postcard of himself—so modest —didn't want to at first. Have you read him, Mr. Grantham ? '

' I read *Tess of the d'Urbervilles.*'

' And what did you think of it ? '

' Oh, it was very fine.'

' I am glad. That is what I always say. If there's anybody deserves immortality it's Mr. Hardy. Are you *au courant* with all his works ? '

' Not all,' said Simon. He was barely listening to her now. Incomplete pictures of a cottage and a garden flashed into his mind : a cottage and a garden and a bent, nervous, thin man to whom he must always be very kind.

' It is so nice to find somebody who reads. Sir Graham, don't you find this generation *très volage* ? '

' What in the hell's that ? '

' Oh, father, *please*,' said Delphine.

' Sorry, Mrs. Gall, but I am very shaky on my French.'

' It means flighty—not serious, father.'

' Oh, yes. They're that all right. Sorry I said hell, Mrs. Gall. It's cursing niggers that did it.'

' It's quite all right, dear Sir Graham. We always say in New York that an Englishman is the only person who can swear and still be a gentleman. You must come to New York someday, Sir Graham. We are all *sans cérémonie* in America, you know.'

'Yes,' he answered, and he wondered vaguely why his wife had invited this woman to disturb his quiet.

'To our crossword puzzle, Mr. Grantham,' she said. When she stood up, an incongruous, pink fluffy dress fell about her, slowly, for her figure was one that thwarted the power of gravitation. Simon looked at her. He thought her like one of the lampshades in the Adelphi Hotel in Liverpool.

'Come,' she said, shaking the *Morning Post* at him. 'Help me with my angel of fire in six letters, *pour passer le temps*.' Ralph Alveston came in then, just as Mrs. Brandon Gall walked out.

'Father, that woman's a fool.'

'A bloody fool, my boy. Can't think why your mother invited her.'

'She's got a kind heart, father,' interrupted Delphine.

'Kind heart be damned! Look at her dress! I can't see her heart! Fatty degeneration, I wouldn't be surprised.'

'Oh, you are cruel, father. I am going to help them with their puzzle.'

'She's the angel of fire herself, if you ask me,' was Sir Graham's last remark.

Then he turned to Lord Truedale. 'We'll shoot?'

'Yes.'

'Right.'

And that is all they said until they were out on the moors, with the heather springing up

behind their feet, and the chirp of the wheatear beyond the pale larches.

'What do you think of young Grantham? Quiet, of course, but a lot of character.'

'I like him, a thoughtful boy. But who is he?'

'A New Zealander. Don't know much. Shares rooms with my boy at Cambridge. Apparently fond of Delphine. Still worse, Delphine's fond of him.'

'You have to be careful. Who is he?'

'Don't know, I tell you. Ralph says he's the finest fellow in the college. Carries his drink like a gentleman and that pleases me.'

They stopped. Two birds rose and staying low, flew up, over the hill. They fired. But the birds flew on, making a detour because of the noise.

'Not as good as we used to be, Alveston.'

'Not as good be damned! We're young yet.' And each introduced a careless spring into his walk as they separated and turned down, over the other side of the hill.

II

Sir Graham Alveston had seen a photograph of Bhoidach in *Country Life*. Lady Alveston had been sitting next to him, embroidering the background of a floral firescreen and occasionally looking up, to see the Bay of Naples stretched out before the hotel.

'Listen,' he had said. 'To let, for August, September and October, on the shores of Loch

Tain : shooting and fishing. Italian villa, fourteen bedrooms and dressing rooms, six bath., own water, elec. l., servants optional.'

He had folded the page back and passed the paper to Lady Alveston. ' See the photograph of the house. It looks like what we want.'

' Oh, more shooting, Graham. As if you hadn't shot quite enough. And fishing ! That means midges, I know. I'd have to get that midge recipe from Nina. Simply marvellous. Let me see—Italian villa and Italian garden—you did not say Italian garden when you read it out. An Italian garden without having to come to this smelly place for it. I am sure that manager is immoral. The way he looks at Delphine.'

' Yes, yes, stop your prattle. Shall I write for further particulars ? '

' I suppose so. We've got to go somewhere, though I hoped it would not be a shooting place. Still, I've always given in to you and I suppose I mustn't change now.'

' You've got the wanderings again, Trixie. Shall I write or not ? '

' Oh, yes, write ! '

So the Alvestons came to Bhoidach, arriving on the terrace in front of the florescent Italian villa, with cars, servants, dogs and luggage.

Bhoidach's Italian towers and blue shutters rose incongruously against the Scottish hill. The gardens in front sloped gently to the edge of the loch which you could see in strips, be-

tween slim cypresses. The terrace itself was like an herbaceous border, with Lady Alveston and her guests spread out in the sunshine ; sitting on gay Paris café chairs. They sat thus after breakfast, Lady Alveston with the embroidered firescreen to which she added four stitches before she put it down on the flags and said, ' Isn't this air marvellous, my dear ?—it's like champagne.'

Mrs. Brandon Gall looked up and said ' divine ' and then lowered her head again, to mumble possible words for the puzzle to which she had drawn an unwilling Simon.

' Now, isn't that just too awful, Mr. Grantham. Who knows a Siamese river in nine letters ? '

' Dear, dear, come here, Ralph.' Lady Alveston waved a vague hand into space and Ralph walked out of the dining room. ' Help poor Mrs. Gall with her puzzle, dear. What do we poor parents send you to schools and colleges and things for if you can't answer historical questions ? '

' Delphine wants you to go and find the mole catcher with her, Simon,' said Ralph. ' I'll take your place as right hand to Mrs. Gall.'

' Oh, that's too sweet of you, Ralph. I may call him Ralph, mayn't I, Lady Alveston ? We Americans rush to Christian names, I am afraid. *Très familier.*' She fussed her skirt and made room for Ralph on the sofa ; a wicker sofa stained with red and green medallions.

Simon walked into the house. ' A charming

boy your friend, Ralph,' said Mrs. Gall as he sat down.

'Yes, he's a good fellow.'

They then wrestled with the angel of fire.

Simon found Delphine fiddling with carnations in a bowl. She had walked to the window three times to see if he was coming, each time returning to what she thought was a desirable setting in which to be discovered.

'Oh, Simon, wouldn't it be fun to hunt out that old mole catcher and make him talk. I simply love his accent.'

Simon stood in the window for a moment. She looked at him. The sunlight burst into the room, through the edges of his hair, through his ears. He was tall and broad. Delphine trembled as she looked at his shoulders. They made her feel faint and negative. He walked towards her.

'Delphine, this is the first time we've been alone since I came. Are you evading me?'

'Don't be silly, of course I'm not.'

Her hand was resting on the table. Simon touched it gently.

'Don't be romantic in the morning, Simon. It isn't done.'

'Done? What do you mean?'

'Oh, I don't know. Let's get the ponies and ride up over the hill and find the old chap. I want to hear him roll his rrrr's.'

'I'd like that. A good idea. Will Ralph mind us deserting him?'

'No. He'll be pleased not to be with me.

We've been together too long. We fought dreadfully in Naples.'

'It must have been all his fault.'

'Oh, Simon, it was.'

They walked up to the stables. When they looked back, they could see Lady Alveston and Mrs. Gall and Ralph on the terrace.

'Do you like Mrs. Gall?'

Simon said, 'Yes, of course. Why?'

'You're a liar. You don't, and neither do I. You think she's vulgar and so do I.'

'You said it, I didn't,' answered Simon.

'Can't think why mother asked her. She's been married three times. Two divorces, you know. She must know a thing or two.'

'What part did she play in them?'

'Oh, my dear, I don't know. Wronged innocence according to the courts. But she has kicked the high spots. Her first husband is supposed to have killed himself. Jealousy, I believe.'

Delphine turned. They were walking away from the house and the terrace. 'I think it would be fun to make a man kill himself over you.' Then she tugged Simon's arm. He was not answering her. 'Wouldn't you like to feel that your wife loved you so much that she'd take strychnine because of jealousy, Simon?'

'By heaven, no. I wouldn't. I hope I'd never give her cause to, anyway.'

'Oh, Mr. Faithful. You would be a model husband then?'

'Well, I don't believe in that sort of thing. I think divorce is wrong.'

'But why, Simon? If people don't love each other any more, it's a sin to keep them from finding somebody they might love. You are narrow-minded.'

'Well, don't let's be serious, Delphine. I suppose I am. But I'm a Catholic and I can't see that a marriage which is supposed to have the sanction of God, can be undone by a human power. The church won't marry them again, will it?'

'No, I suppose not. But the registry offices do it for them.'

'That's dreadful to me.'

'Oh, Simon, don't be such a prig.'

'I'm not a prig, Delphine. But I've got my own ideas about these things.'

'Well, so have I. I'd hate to think I was going to be tied to a man I didn't love.'

'Then you'd have to be sure in the first place.'

'Anyway, people can love two or three times, I suppose. It always wears off—the passion part.'

They were near the stables then, above a prattling burn which was hidden beneath a tangle of undergrowth and bracken. A rabbit scurried down the slope.

'Then we mustn't talk about it any more, Delphine, because we don't agree.'

'Oh, all right. Only I do think you are a prig. You'd shut your wife up in a turret or

make her wear a veil when she met any men, I suppose.'

'No, but I'd be certain first. That's all.'

'Ha, that's a woman's job, Simon. Never to let a man be certain.'

She was sorry she had said it.

'We'll talk about ponies now! Which one am I to take?'

'Moby, if you like.'

So they trotted out of the yard, on to the road that skirted the shore of the loch and for ten minutes they cantered towards the cluster of houses, at the far end of the silver water.

The opposite shore was a chessboard of fields. There were black cattle grazing on jade green: in another, lighter green, there were white sheep. Between the two fields there was a stretch of ripe yellow oats and from this a hundred birds flew into space, white seagulls and oyster catchers. They were disturbed by a train that moved sinuously around a bend. The air was so still that the white smoke seemed to remain motionless, in a curve above the engine, like the neck of a fabulous swan.

The clouds made shadows which swept down the hill, over the loch, interrupting the silver with patches of dove grey.

Simon and Delphine left the main road, turning down a track where the plumes of bracken swished against their stirrups. Sometimes there were old brown toadstools, cracked, and spotted like leopard skin.

Delphine pulled her pony in. 'Simon, be a dear and shorten my left stirrup.'

He dismounted and led his pony over to her.

As he fumbled with the buckle, she said, 'Don't take much notice of what I said—of anything I say. I don't think. You see, I'm my mother's daughter and although she is a dear, she never thinks. And sometimes I'm like that, too. So don't take much notice.'

He pressed his hand over hers.

'I don't remember anything you said. I only know that I've been here three days and that I haven't kissed you. You're so high up that I can't jump. I can't just *do* it. So I've got to say please lean down.' He put his arms up, around her. She bent down and Simon kissed her. He moved away from her and looked at her mouth. It was open a little. He could see the edge of her lips become tighter each time she breathed. Kissing her was not just a pleasant touch ; his mouth was almost unconscious of it. He seemed to be drowning himself in an ecstasy. He wanted to drag her from the pony and envelop her . . . he half thought of a great hot animal conscious, as it crushed a pale, sweet flower under its body. He kissed her again and she was frightened of his kiss. She sat up. She put the back of her hand on her mouth and held the loose skin between her teeth.

Simon kissed her other hand then, tenderly, as if the legs of a butterfly had touched her fingers. 'I am terribly in love with you,' he

said. He walked, leading both ponies, to a stretch of grass behind which there was a larch wood, filled with cool green light.

He lifted Delphine from her saddle. Then he tied both the ponies to a tree. They could not see the road, nor the cottages. Behind them was the wood, silent and cool. The lichen on the larches made the sunlight grey and gossammery above the floor of moss, red toadstools and rotting wood.

They sat on the grass. By the dyke there were buttercups and bluebells, wild mustard and, like white stars against the grey stone, ragged robins that nodded delicately in the faint wind.

The warm smell of the earth mixed with the scent of clover. They stretched themselves out. The sun burned down until Delphine turned on her side, to stop the light from dazzling her eyes.

She looked at Simon. He too had turned, towards her. She knew that her feeling for him was different from his love for her. She knew she could never do anything but hurt him . . . hurt him wickedly. As she had been overwhelmed by his stature when he stood over her on the river boat at Cambridge, so now she would have liked to lie still and feel him moving towards her, over her. She knew she was the first person he had ever kissed. The fumbling of his first kiss had told her that. A wonderful experience—to be the first adventure of a boy like this, with all his faith and serious, earnest devotion. His love would be a tornado

of guileless passion. And while she thought thus, he did move towards her. She closed her eyes. She could feel the warmth of the ground against her head. She wanted to sink into the heat of it and feel Simon sinking with her. She opened her eyes. He was leaning over her. She could smell the tweed of his clothes—that and the hot human smell made her faint and passive. He put one hand under her neck. 'Darling,' he said, 'do I tell you I love you too often?'

She did not answer him.

He leaned over her, closer. He picked a clover and tickled her ear with it. He drew it down about her throat. He watched its creamy petals moving over her soft skin. Then he lowered his lips and gently retraced the path of the clover over her, hardly touching her with his mouth, until he kissed the soft lobe of her ear. He put both his arms around her and drew her up to him. They were so close that Delphine felt as if their bodies were mingling and becoming one. Again and again he kissed her and at last she drew her hand away from between them and rested it on his head. She stroked his hair and fumbled with his ears, between her fingers. Curlews called to each other, through the wood. The sun rose higher and higher. It burned Simon's hair so that Delphine could feel the heat on the palm of her hand.

They lay there for a long time. Simon did not kiss her now. He lay still, beside her, his

fingers playing listlessly with her hair. When he did stand up and lift her from the ground, she clung to him, holding the lapels of his coat.

'We haven't seen the mole-catcher, Simon.'

'No, but it doesn't matter. He'll be there to-morrow.'

They rode back to the house. From the terrace, Lady Alveston waved a newspaper to them and called 'Lunch, lunch,' and went in through the French windows, dragging the lace curtains in her wake.

III

Sir Graham, Ralph and Simon were to shoot rabbits in the evening. Lady Alveston said she would join the beaters. 'My dear Graham, there isn't the slightest reason why I shouldn't be useful. If I put on strong shoes, I can whack the bracken as well as anybody else.'

They walked out over the moors. When Sir Graham, Ralph and Simon were at the summit of a brae, the drivers (Lady Alveston waving a stick and filling the glen with her comments), started from the low ground, beating through the fern, up, towards the guns. 'Don't shoot me, Mr. Grantham. Don't mistake me for a rabbit,' screamed Lady Alveston. 'If you will shoot things, don't shoot me. Or is it pepper—yes—shot guns pepper. I know, I read it.' She advanced up the hill, saying 'shoo-shoo,' as if she were chasing chickens. Once a frightened roe-deer broke out of the scrub and leapt, gracefully, nervously, towards the larches

on the right. Sir Graham fired. 'I hope he's missed it. It was too lovely for words. Besides we've got one of those, stuffed at home in Cumberland, and heaven knows we don't want another.' Sir Graham called out to her, 'Shut up, mother.'

'Dear me, am I spoiling it all? I am sorry.'

Then they were silent. There was only the sound of the beaters, their shouting and the swish of the bracken. One little brown rabbit ran madly into the open. Ralph raised his gun and fired and the rabbit made a quick convulsive struggle and lay dead on the grass. Another ran out, its snow white tail bobbing above the waves of grass. It fell and lay still. 'Poor things. I feel like a murderer. My God, Mr. Grantham, don't point that thing at me. Graham, Graham, stop him. He'll shoot or something.' Then Simon did shoot and another rabbit dropped, while making a desperate, unsuccessful effort to jump the dyke and escape. The beaters were clear of the bracken. Lady Alveston saw one of the rabbits, just as the dog was picking it up. The top of its head had been blown away and the tangled bloody inside was uppermost. 'Oh, Graham. It is too awful—intestines—I know them—look—oh, Mr. Grantham, take me back to the house. I can't bear it.'

'Shut up, mother, you shouldn't have come.'

'Oh, I'll never come again. Only take me back, Mr. Grantham. I can't bear death in any form.'

'You can go alone, mother,' said Ralph.

But Simon handed his gun to one of the beaters and Lady Alveston took his arm. They walked away from the cluster of guns and beaters, down into the glen again. 'Oh, you think I'm foolish, don't you, Mr. Grantham?'

'No, certainly not,' answered Simon.

'I come from a family that hates blood. Not like Sir Graham. His people were always good at battles and all that. Trafalgar. Yes, one of his ancestors was at that. Won it, I believe. But my family was different. Read books, you know. I am the same. Dear me, look at that bog-myrtle. The first I've seen. Pick it for me, please. Yes, I was saying about books. I am for construction, building up life, not destroying it. I love reading. That's why I love dear Mrs. Gall. Now she *is* an intellectual. Just like my father. He made us read when we were young.'

Simon looked over the landscape, the heather and the bracken. Two horses were galloping in a field, still frightened by the sounds of shooting.

'Do you come from a family of readers, Mr. Grantham? Did your father read? It must be sad not to have your father. You must miss him. He is dead, isn't he?'

'No, Lady Alveston, he is in New Zealand.'

'Oh, you never told me. Tell me about him. How interesting. Does he shoot or read? There are always two types. They shoot or they read.'

'I am afraid he does neither very much. He's ill, or at least he has been ill, for some years.'

Lady Alveston thought of heart, then tuberculosis. 'Nothing terrible, I hope.'

'Well, it's mostly—nerves—he is—well—he has had a slight nervous trouble.'

'Oh, you should have him with you!' She enjoyed this merciless pursuit of information.

'He has been in a nursing home all the time. He couldn't be with me.'

'Nerves! In hospital! Oh!'

He hated her, suddenly. He turned and looked at her. He saw the unintelligent, silly smile that always moved across her face when she spoke. It was consistent, unchanging, always to pattern.

'My father was a mental case, Lady Alveston. I suppose there is no use my hiding the fact behind kind words. He is better now. He comes to England to join me next year.'

'Oh! Dear me! How sad! Did I pry, Mr. Grantham? I am so very, very sorry. Here we are! We'll have some tea. I must have some tea.'

Simon went to his room, to take off his shooting boots. A tide of difference had run in between him and this fussing, insincere group of people. He was on an island. And for the first time since he was fourteen, he wrung his hands. Delphine and his father—a succession of Delphines swam in his eyes, and a

succession of fathers, old nervous men, looking at their thumbs.

He saw the bed. For a moment he remembered himself as a boy, lying on a bed, crying. To do it again now. It wasn't even an idea in his mind. It was like a fork of lightning, far back over the moors. He shut his eyes to it. He changed quickly, so very quickly. He was serene and cold as he walked downstairs. The tea was in the drawing-room. The butler was opening a gate-leg table as Simon walked in. 'Her Ladyship is having tea in her room, Sir. May I pour it out for you? Miss Delphine is out walking and won't be back until late.'

When Simon had almost finished his tea, Mrs. Brandon Gall came in. 'Oh, Mr. Grantham, how fortunate I am, having you all to myself. Delphine steals you all the time. Ah, Mr. Grantham, we Americans see these little things!' She shook her finger, with its turquoise, hanging like a blue berry on a white twig. 'Ha-ha-ha—I guess somebody's secret.'

'I am sure you do,' said Simon.

'And that somebody is just a teeny bit annoyed. But I am right, aren't I?'

'I don't know what you mean, Mrs. Gall.'

'Ah well, let's say no more. Delphine is a very charming girl. She's the W. L. George type, I think, don't you?' Or perhaps Galsworthy. Yes, I think his psychology would fit Delphine. But perhaps the beauty of love makes one blind to the beauty of books, Mr. Grantham.'

Then Simon made a remark completely unlike himself. ' Love is not the only thing that does that.'

He had a faint suspicion that he had excelled himself. He walked out of the room, on to the terrace, alone.

IV

Lady Alveston remembered all the instances of insanity that had come into her experience of life. They had never been near to her. Once a lonely shepherd had knocked on the door, at three o'clock in the morning. The dog he had been nursing for two weeks lay dead, in his arms. He had raved at Sir Graham Alveston, until they took him away and gave him brandy in the kitchen. ' He's gawn daft,' her servant told her next morning. Then there were sinister stories told over tea cups—coming out again in the third generation—look at the Raidstairs—madness—two generations quite all right and now, look at the little boy ! Odd ! Couldn't go to school. Kept away when people called.

She heard Sir Graham walk into his dressing-room. His boots made two heavy thuds on the floor.

She walked over to the communicating door. ' Graham, I want to talk to you.'

He opened the door. ' Well, a nice fool you made of yourself, and taking young Grantham away, spoiling his shooting.'

' Oh, did I ? Well, this is one occasion when

I am not a fool. Graham, that boy, Simon Grantham, is funny in the head.'

'What do you mean—funny in the head?'

'He told me with his own lips. His father is insane: quite insane.'

'Oh!'

'Yes, and that means only one thing. Heredity and all that. He must go away or Delphine must go.'

'I don't see why. Good God, you've got a mind like a Drury Lane melodrama.'

'Well, if I've any responsibility towards my own daughter, I won't run any risks with them. They're fond of each other as it is. Delphine came into this room last night and practically confessed that she was in love with him. At her age! And you never know what she'd do. I haven't forgotten that dreadful little man who hovered outside her room at Dinard. She's indiscreet. It's not my blood in her, Heaven knows. She might do anything—this is fate's stroke on you for your wickedness. You were always carnal in the mind. She'd bring shame on us!'

'Oh, shut up. It's your tongue that does all the wickedness in this house. I like Grantham. He is a gentleman. He stands his drink like a gentleman. Any man who can have eight Scotches and still say "Six thick thistle sticks" is as sane as I am. I tried him. I told him if he kept up with me, drink for drink, I'd take him and Delphine to the opera and leave you and Ralph at home. I told him that if he

didn't keep up with me, I'd bring you too, and, my God, he drank like a fish.'

'Are you trying to insult me?'

'No.'

'Well, keep to the subject. Delphine must go to Nina to-morrow morning and stay with her until Simon Grantham leaves this house. I like him all right, but I'm not going to leave them together, with his father in a madhouse. Anyway, he's a Catholic and that means priestcraft.'

'Do what you like about Delphine. She's as stupid as you are and I'm sure Grantham is better off. All women are fools. Some of them are damn fools——well—that's what I think of both of you.'

He went back to his dressing-room and Lady Alveston ran out of her room and called 'Delphine. Delphine, come quick to your poor mother. I'm being insulted again. Quick!'

Delphine appeared. 'Come into my room. Oh, my dear! Our August is spoiled. Everything dreadful is happening. It's Nemesis—or Revelations—which is it, Delphine—oh! You must go away, Delphine. Simon Grantham's father is a raving lunatic, so you can't marry him. Don't ask me why, my dear. One of life's mysteries—heredity—no, I never meant to say that. You must go to your Aunt Nina first thing to-morrow morning. Say it's asthma. No, say it's something quick, like apoplexy. Yes, a stroke.'

'Why should I go?' said Delphine. 'You are always making mountains out of molehills.'

'Delphine, don't dare to speak to me like that. I'm your mother.'

'I will dare. I see your game. Chattering away as if you don't notice anything and trying to be alone with him all the time.'

'Delphine. I won't have it.'

'You will have it. I know you, through and through. Fussing over a dead rabbit just to make him walk back with you. I see it all. It's what you did at Dinard. You think Dad is a fool. But he knows. Everybody laughs at you for it.'

'Graham! Graham! Come quick!' Lady Alveston called. 'I'm being insulted by my own child—my own flesh and blood—Graham!'

Delphine's face was a mask of hard, straight, cruel lines. 'There you are, raving again. But it won't get you Dad's sympathy. Chicken stealing—that's what you do. Good tunes on old fiddles—ha! Dad said it's time you learned the Swan Song.'

Her father opened the door.

'What the hell's the row? Has she told you, Delphine?'

'Yes, she has. Getting me out of the way to have a clear run for herself.'

'Delphine, shut up. You mustn't speak to your mother like that. Perhaps she's right. It wouldn't do to give him a wrong idea. If you are fond of him, you must get over it.'

Lady Alveston waved a bottle of smelling

salts in the air. ' I haven't a friend in my own family. My own children bite the hand that feeds them. O God ! Look down on them ! Retribution ! Oh ! Oh ! ' She walked over to the sofa and threw herself down, with her head turned so that she should not miss the scene.

' Delphine, we'll talk this over afterwards. It is better. I like the boy very much. But if there's madness in the family, you must get over being fond of him.'

' Oh, I'll get over being fond of him. I am not such a fool as that. I'm too much like mother to think of anybody but myself.'

There was a groan from the sofa. ' Coals of fire, oh, coals of fire, smiting me.'

' Delphine, don't let's be dramatic about this. You can go away to your Aunt Nina in the morning. I'll telephone to her to-night.'

Lady Alveston sat up. ' Oh, no. I'll telephone. She's my sister. She won't turn against me.'

' We aren't turning against you,' said Sir Graham. ' You talk a lot of nonsense. Delphine will go, won't you, dear ? You can drive over. You'll do the thirty miles in an hour and arrive there in time for lunch.'

' Oh, I suppose so. But you needn't think I'm a fool about men. I know where I am.'

Then she turned to her mother. ' Only old women make fools of themselves over men. Mutton trying to pose as lamb.'

' Go out of the room, Delphine. You are a wicked vixen,' said Sir Graham. ' You both

are, for that matter. Leave your mother alone.'

Delphine banged the door and went back to her room. She sat in front of her mirror for almost an hour, with a clay pack on her face. Then she dressed, with sneaking self-consciousness. When she was almost ready to go downstairs, she put tuberose scent behind her ears and then she dragged at the front of her dress, until it was low enough to show the shadow of the dimple above her breasts.

Her dress was covered with bronze coloured sequins. Her shoes, too, were bronze. Her hair was tight against her head and she wore two large grey pearls on her ears. She turned around and moved her body, watching the reflection over her shoulder—and she turned again and smiled with pleasure at the living curves that moved under her dress.

Lady Alveston walked into the drawing room in a flutter of green tulle.

'Oh, Mr. Grantham, yes, we did agree on Simon, didn't we? Terrible news. Delphine has to go to her Aunt Nina to-morrow. You know, married Colonel Sir Cuthbert Wainwright, soldier and all that. Had a stroke. Wants Delphine. She must go. Too sad. Probably not back before you go. Never mind!'

'Oh, I am sorry, Lady Alveston! I am disappointed!'

'Never mind.' She looked towards the door. 'Mrs. Gall and I, or is it "me." I never know.

We'll look after you as best we can. Am I dull and old? Don't say that.'

'Goodness gracious! No—well—no. Of course not. That's silly, isn't it?'

'Oh, now you're saying I'm silly. Chivalry! Oh, Mr. Grantham, is knighthood torn up by the roots?'

'I hope not, Lady Alveston.'

'Well, never mind. We'll see. Here are the others.'

Mrs. Brandon Gall came in, heavy with silver lace and too many diamonds.

'Thinks this is a Court,' whispered Sir Graham to Simon.

Mrs. Gall went up to Lady Alveston. 'Dear Trixie. I've just finished my book. Too dee-vine!'

'What is it, Mrs. Gall?' asked Simon.

'Er—well—we—it was an anthology—all little bits.'

'Oh, that's nice, isn't it?' said Lady Alveston. 'Potpourri. That's better than a long book. So many sidelights. Ralph, I wish you'd read more.'

'I do, mother. Simon is the one. He never looks at a book.'

'Oh, I'll lend you one. Have you read *Thaïs*?' asked Mrs. Gall.

'No, I'm afraid I haven't.'

'Then I'll lend it to you after dinner.'

'Thank you—I'd love that.'

They went in to dinner. Delphine moved towards Simon.

'This is awful,' he said.

'What?' she asked.

'You're going away, aren't you?'

'Yes, how did you know?'

'Your mother told me.'

'She would!'

'Why? How do you mean?'

'Oh, nothing, we'll talk after dinner.'

Lady Alveston did not leave Delphine and Simon alone from when he walked into the drawing room. She joined Mrs. Gall in a cascade of nonsensical talk until ten o'clock. 'Maeterlinck, *ma chère—The Bluebird.* What a lesson to us all!'

'Ah, yes. I saw it once. Do you remember, Delphine? Have you seen it, Simon? But I don't suppose you have theatres in New Zealand. They'd have to be in *native*, and I am sure you couldn't translate *The Bluebird* into native.'

'Oh, we have theatres all right. We aren't complete barbarians, you know.'

'We are teasing you, Mr. Grantham,' said Mrs. Gall. 'Of course they have theatres, libraries and all that. I always think the psychology of new countries is so in-ter-esting. Don't you, Sir Graham?'

'Eh, what! Psychology! What in the hell's that?'

'Come, Delphine. To bed. It is ten o'clock.'

'Oh, mother. I want to say goodbye to Simon. It will be such a rush in the morning.'

'No, it won't, my dear. Besides, you must be at your best if you are going to drive all that way.'

'It's only thirty miles!'

'Nonsense—thirty—then they must have changed it. It used to be over a hundred.'

'Yes, but that's from Cumberland.'

'Oh, how stupid! Mr. Grantham—Simon, have you ever known anybody as stupid as I am?'

Ralph emerged from behind a bound volume of *Country Life*. 'Say *no*, Simon. It's true.'

'What a family! Come, Delphine.'

She smiled to Simon and he returned her 'Goodnight' with an anxious movement of his eyes.

'Grantham, pour me out a drink, don't be mean with it, and thank God you aren't married. If women are pretty, make 'em into mistresses. If they're plain, make 'em into cooks. But don't marry 'em. Don't you agree with me, sir?'

'No, Sir, I am afraid I don't.'

'Oh, well, give me my drink and don't let's talk of disagreeable things. Ralph here, he'll run after a skirt soon I suppose. Keep your eye on him at Cambridge, Grantham.'

Ralph put his book down. 'Dad, you talk almost as much rot as mother!'

'My God, I don't! Sir, is that a thing to say to your father! Grantham, would you speak to your father like that?'

They looked at each other. The older man saw the change of expression in Simon's face.

Ralph went to bed and left them alone.

'Another drink, Grantham?'

'No, thank you, Sir.'

'Yes'—then all the swashbuckling briskness died out of his voice. 'To please me, my boy.' Simon glanced at him quickly. A kind smile came to Sir Graham Alveston's face.

'I'm sorry Delphine's going, Grantham. But you mustn't ever worry about women. Women were made to worry, men were made to work. They enjoy misery, so don't ever trespass on their rights, Grantham. Look at me! I've never worried about women. They've always worried about me. I've led 'em a dance in my day. Now, Trixie is getting back revenge on behalf of the whole of her sex. Still, I mustn't be disloyal. You're a good lad, Grantham. I wish Ralph had half your spunk. No backbone! I shouldn't say it of my own son, but there you are.'

'Oh, Ralph's all right, sir. He takes a lot of knowing.'

'May be. Be good to him, Grantham, and I'll thank you some day. I don't want him to develop into one of these la-de-da young men that go to the Russian ballet and wear stays! What!'

'He won't do that.'

'Well, pray to God he won't! Still, I'm sorry about Delphine going away and I'm your friend, Grantham—see—we're good friends

always. We understand each other—see—what! Have another Scotch? No! Well, perhaps you know best.'

He pulled the curtains back. Then he muttered, loud enough for Simon to hear, 'Women, not worth the candle. Stupid girl, Delphine—insincere—!' His voice resumed its former blustering strength after that. He looked out, between the curtains. 'A good day to-morrow. If the sun is not too strong and if this breeze keeps up, there should be some fishin' on the loch. Like fishin', Grantham?'

'Yes, Sir.'

'Well, never put all your bait on one hook—see—what! Goodnight.'

Simon said 'Goodnight. I think I'll walk a little before I go to bed.' He went into the hall, took a cap and a stick and walked out on to the terrace.

## V

Except when achieved through suffering, happiness causes humanity to acclaim the devil: a devil represented by self-indulgence, irresponsibility and selfishness. Sorrow gives people increased consciousness of God: not necessarily God the Creator, of conventional religious conception: rather the God who is approached through sensibility, appreciation of beauty, unselfishness, and pity for tormented things.

Simon had never known excess of either

happiness or suffering. He had never been deeply moved by his father's oddness. He had been too young to question his circumstances in New Zealand. So he had not suffered, for ignorance is a protection against intense sorrow.

At Cambridge, too, he had never been morbidly unhappy nor deliciously elated : he stayed in the evenly flowing mid-stream of social ease, moderate scholarship and prowess at games. Now, for the first time in his life, he was conscious of unhappiness. It was a droning, whirring, intangible thing that made the landscape unreal and the immediate objects, garden seats, cypresses, standard roses, seem like fantastic figures, tantalising him, approaching and retreating in the moonlight.

He thought he was in love with Delphine. He did not know that it was love in the abstract that he wanted. He did not know that Delphine was pitiless and insincere. He was too generous in his mind to realise that Lady Alveston was a shifty, stupid woman, who was saved from social perdition only because she was too cowardly to indulge in the immoralities of her imagination : a woman whose mind played with the phrase ' nice boys.'

He did not know that even Sir Graham's kindness was only a twisting, foreign streak of brightness that wound through his murky nature, like a tendril of gold through a buhl decoration : that the red and black of the tortoise shell were represented in this blustering

Tartarin, by the reputation of a runner after girls, a man of shady financial deals and whisky decanters in his dressing room.

Simon saw none of these things.

Ralph Alveston was his friend in a subdued sense : neither Ralph nor the friendship had character. Only Simon's overwhelming force of goodness represented a shining light about which Ralph Alveston hovered, moth-like, foolishly.

When Simon walked out over the moor, knowing as he did that his conversation with Lady Alveston was linked with Delphine's departure, he thought more actively than ever before.

There was no movement on the moor. In one place, there was a patch of heather, set in the lighter grass. Pointed at each end, it looked like a black galley on a grey sea. Simon was unhappy. The procession that passed through his mind was headed by Delphine, pale, elusive Delphine. Then there were many figures, and over them his father hovered, leading them away from him. Simon was lonely. The muscles of his face moved from the effort he made to restrain his emotion. He lifted his arms and he raised his eyes—He smelled the hearts-ease and the asphodel and the heather : he saw the moon, red and pointed. Their significance came to him at the same time as the desire to depend on somebody and he called, ' Delphine, I love you, Delphine.' Then he stood still. The pine trees were black.

The paler larches withheld the last grey strands of the moonlight. He had walked a long way. He tramped over a rise and then down into a hollow. Here it was darker and the ground was low and sodden. It squelched as he walked. He stood alone, within two basins, the one upturned, pearl-grey, with blue undertones, the other a gigantic grey-brown bowl of earth. A burn made a thread of bubbling sound through the corrie. A curlew's note pierced the stillness.

He followed the burn for a mile and then he found a shepherd's hut. Somebody was moving a warm light about the room. A yellow wedge slid across the earth outside. Within, a girl was singing.

'Oh, how could ye think, Jamie,
How could ye think,
O, how could ye think that I lo'ed ye?
For it's O and I lo'e ane,
But I daurna tell his name,
And I never, never meant to deceive ye.'

'Then how could ye look, Jeannie,
How could ye look?
And what when your e'en met mine, lass?
For wi' sorrow in my heart,
And the tears in my e'en,
I maun down to the grave loving thee, lass.'

He walked towards the fields. The asphodel and hearts-ease and the thyme and the bluebell were in the darkness. He was tired. He did not call, 'Delphine, Delphine,' again. He had thought—he had thought so that he was afraid of the increasing strength of his own mind.

VI

Simon went out with the guns early in the morning, before Delphine came downstairs. Sir Graham, Lady Alveston and Mrs. Brandon Gall were already at the table when he came down. Mrs. Brandon Gall was talking about her diet.

'You know, Sir Graham, I think apples are a wonderful invention. We have a saying in America, "an apple a day keeps the doctor away." But perhaps you have that saying in England, too, it's surely drifted across here by now.'

Sir Graham was in a blustering mood. 'Oh, yes, we've got that saying all right, Mrs. Gall. But you just eat up the other half of your apple or you'll find half a doctor in your bedroom.'

'Oh, you're being jocular, Sir Graham.'

'Delphine is not coming down to breakfast,' said Lady Alveston. 'She's got a headache—dreadful things, headaches, nothing but *cache-faivre*. She must leave at eleven to arrive in time for lunch. Nina's so fussy about times. House full of clocks, tick, tick, tick, drive you mad!'

'But, Lady Alveston, I must say goodbye to her.'

Ralph answered Simon. 'Of course. Run up now.'

Lady Alveston was breaking a rusk at the end of the table. 'Yes, of course, call out to her

through the door. Ralph, you go with him. You must both say goodbye.'

They made facetious comments through the bedroom door.

'Goodbye, Delphine. Delphine, goodbye!' Ralph opened the door. Simon saw her for a moment. Breakfast tray in front of her. She blew him a kiss, from her curled hand.

Ralph pulled Simon's sleeve. 'Come on, don't be sentimental.'

They joined the guns, the beaters with their red-purple faces and their white flags, the eager dogs, sniffing the ground.

They climbed a thousand feet, over the wet moss, red, yellow, and green: over ground where the patches of bracken and heather made a fantastic map of purple countries, floating in a green sea. They shot from the butts in the morning and over the rough ground in the afternoon. Simon stood with his chest pressed against the wall of black mould. He thought of Delphine, while the line of beaters and white flags drew in and while the grouse flew over him, some escaping into the heather, some hesitating, falling, floundering in a muddle of feathers and twitching nerves, into the heather. But, as the sun rose higher and as his eyes scanned the skyline, he thought less and less of Delphine. He was emerging from his self-pity, like a straight tree freeing itself of surrounding fog. The birds whipped the air with their wings, the guns split the warm silence over the moor. When they reached the last line of

butts, Simon found himself on the shoulder of a hill, above the lowland and the far away sea, the vague city which swam in a mist, the loch which was almost under him, far spreading, shining.

After lunch they moved over the hills, towards a wood. Here they waited at the edge while the beaters skirted the trees and drove back towards them. Terrified roe deer sprang nervously through the trees, magnificent capers beat the air with their black wings and fell to ground, burying their beaks in the bracken, the blood staining their breast feathers. Simon was excited. His eyes danced with keen anticipation as they searched the patches of light between the trunks or watched the line where the trees met the sky. Wood pigeon, kestrels, capers and a roe deer fell to the guns. A buzzard soared splendidly past, undisturbed. Rabbits scurried across the open stretches, some to the security of the heather, some only to leap in tortured curves until they dropped back on to the earth, struggling, their little wild brown eyes staring, their feet patting the ground, their white bellies stained with their own blood. A beater would come up and knock them on the head with a stick. They'd lie still and stiff then. The dogs whisked through the bracken, a burn ran noisily down the hill, threading its way through the warm colours of heather and moss, until it spread in a fan on the shores of the loch.

Simon tramped the last mile home with Sir Graham Alveston.

'Bloody good shootin', Grantham.'

'Yes, Sir. I've had the greatest day of my life, I think.'

'Ah! Wait until you've shot elephants. I remember one day when we were shootin' within fifty miles of Bulawayo——'

He went off on side tracks of reminiscence until they came to the house. The dogs hung out their red tongues and the beaters took carefully measured nips of whisky from a bottle. The birds were stretched on the grass and Lady Alveston ran out and said, 'Oh, Mr. Grantham, oh, Simon. Isn't death a dreadful thing? Look at that! Death and destruction hand in hand. Shakespeare said it. Or was it "pleasure and instruction"? I don't know. Never mind. Come in and have some tea. Delphine has gone and I am all alone. Mrs. Gall has a headache and I've sent her *cache-faivre*. Come.'

So they went into the house and they sat round a table with a high urn which looked like a silver turkey, above a brood of cups. Simon was tired and too numb physically and mentally to do anything but rest against the comfort of the moment. He ate and he listened. He looked at a bowl of anemones; mauve, pink and white. They reminded him of Delphine, but the memory was without pain. Then he smoked a cigarette with Ralph on the terrace and they talked of the return to Cambridge and of the people they knew; and Simon said,

' I'm sorry to be going to-morrow.' He thought of Delphine, vaguely, Delphine in the morning, pink and laughing and full of fun, Delphine in the evening, in the half light, on the lawn. He remembered her in a white dress, a white swan trembling on a pool. Delphine flying away, away, forever, over the hills, into space and distance and the unknown, without him. The train, London, his father, a house near Cambridge, duty, and always, forever, no Delphine. Himself alone.

# CHAPTER VI

## I

Simon was subdued during the last three months of the year. Ralph Alveston returned and their friendship became a dormant relationship of mutual good manners. The change could not be explained. Like many friendships, theirs had been based on lack of mutual understanding. Their separation at this point was with as little manifest reason as the forking of paths in a field.

While the train wheels grumbled over the rails, while he busied himself about his return to the university, while study and games and harmless amusements engaged his time, two forces decided their strength within him.

He felt he was in love with Delphine. He knew he was not in love with Delphine. His feelings, which were insecure and sentimental, were swept away by knowledge, common sense and the realisation that the Alvestons were silly people with whom one would never have any serious, permanent association : they were like a gay hoarding, passed on a journey in a train.

Simon's rooms were in Jesus Lane and his window looked out over the Common.

He had won in that struggle between the undergraduate and the room his landlady provides for him. Her pictures had disappeared : his own photographs, some New Zealand landscapes and an old print, ' Hesperus,' hung on the wall. A knight, all sword and ermine, knelt before a lovely girl, and the evening star pierced the upper darkness of the picture. He had never bothered to look at it before. Now that Delphine had opened a new room in his life, he even leaned across the table and read the title once or twice. ' Hesperus,' and, beneath, ' Soft hour which makes the wish and melts the heart.' When he found himself sighing in front of the picture, he braced himself, went out for a bottle of sherry, called in some friends who passed his window, and spent the afternoon before the fire. His sigh was soon drowned in a deluge of limericks and stories : Delphine and the Hesperus retired before sherry and a collection of bawdy tales.

He did not make new friends. But people came to him uninvited. He was popular. He was neither ' hearty ' nor an aesthete. He played games, but he also read books and drank his beer with the best of them. He shook cocktails and despised the Sitwells. He read Edgar Wallace, but Aldous Huxley and Shaw as well. He was tolerant of the Festival Theatre, but said, ' Thank God for a breath of fresh air,' whenever he left it. He did Swedish exercises in the morning, but he also liked a shaded lamp

and an Egyptian cigarette, Wagner and Stravinsky and A. A. Milne. He could become enraptured over King's Chapel but he could also climb into a car, fly to London and dance at the 43, without seeming to identify himself with the actualities of such an adventure. He could dismiss both experiences impersonally, saying, ' Thank God for a breath of fresh air,' when he emerged from them.

He applied himself to scholarship, and when Christmas came he emerged from the year older in sense, calmer in judgment and still as young and healthy and normal as if he had never seen Lady Alveston ; as if neither Cambridge nor Scotland had done anything but strengthen the simplicity of his character. At night, when the last sounds of the town were dying, when the last bicycles, with their baskets, were being stacked against the old stone walls, while Simon was lying in bed, watching the translucent cone of emerald glass from which the light poured into the room below, he did not think of anything but the adventures of his boyhood ; he captured the memory of walks over the hills about Karangahake, and of days when he shot rabbits. Then the sadder pictures of his father, wavering against the familiar backgrounds. The high house on the sun-baked hill, the quiet farm, the beach, the shaking house in the storm. His father's bony legs making sharp points as he sat in the train, on that last journey when Simon took him to the quiet bungalow

where he still remained ; whence he was to come to England.

These scenes drifted past him and then they were increased to include a picture of his father with a cottage near Cambridge. His father in a garden, walking slowly, with an emasculated hand curled around an ash stick, nudging pebbles out of the path, hitting gnarled apples off a tree, watching bees swinging about the hole in a hive. His father in the house, reading, his father growing very old, and Simon always careful of him, worrying about him. His father visiting him, meeting Ralph Alveston, going with him to see the old yard of Corpus, King's, the bridges, and the stately, well-bred Cam, and dinners in hall. How self-consciously Simon had walked across to the table three years before : how calmly he fitted into the college life now : it had become a monotony almost, but a healthy monotony, in which he was neither enthusiastic nor bored.

In April he accepted an invitation to Devon. The succession of remembered scenes was obscured by red cliffs and the blue sea at Babbicombe. He recollected a similar sea sweeping over the sand, below the grave to which he went so often as a boy. But the figure of his mother was so unreal and impersonal to him that the recollection was without feeling. He held it up, looked at it, replaced it, like a postcard out of a box of rejected things.

Slowly, he completed the pictures of his father in the cottage. He was to arrive late in

May. The boat at Southampton, the taxi swinging up over the bridge, to the grey, aristocratic outline of the Houses of Parliament and the solid figure of Big Ben. The days in London, perhaps a fog, with the hanging street lamps, like bilious faces, bumping people, and then the journey with his father in a train, and the cottage. Even before he had decided where his father was to live, he had imagined the cottage, furnished and warmed and lived in. And when he did find it, when he did silence the rattling, unintelligible recommendations of the agent—

'Sir, you won't find a finer place in England : h. and c.w. and own electric light in a village house : Sir, there isn't another in England : and the beams, sir, the old beams. They're worth the money, Sir, the genuine oak.'

'Yes, it will do. We'll take it,' he was not surprised, nor amused by the adventure of possessing a house, of going to the two old ladies, dressed in high-necked black, in the registry office in Bishop's Stortford, of engaging two servants and frowning over their references as if he were in the habit of scrutinising anxious housemaids ; as if he were aware and disapproving of their tricks.

The doctor wrote to Simon every week. He told of James Grantham's progress, his interests and plans, his preparations for the journey and life in England. 'You will find your father more reasonable, with greater self-control than when you were with him in Karangahake.

You must not be nervous of your responsibility. You must remember that he has never been to England, indeed he describes the whole thing as an adventure and he is intensely interested in theatres and politics. If you intend spending a few days in London before you go to the country I should advise you to take him to some kind of entertainment and let him have anything but a serious first impression of what he describes as *the country of my adoption*.'

While Simon was driving along the lanes of Essex, searching for 'A house with a garden,' his father was already on the deck of a steamer crossing the Indian Ocean. An older, more resigned man, his hands resting on the arms of a deck chair, he spent the warm, unmeasured days at sea contemplating the silver blue haze of the sky and the rhythmic swell of the shimmering water and, accustomed to them, he used them as a background for the scenes of his own life, the story of what was behind him and the passionate hope for self-control and happiness in the years that were before him. He was able to contemplate his own nervous condition. He realised the need for control, repose, restraint. Three or four times a day he thought of the moment when he would first see Simon. Then there rose in him the old love for the boy and the unreasoning desire to envelop him completely. When he thought of this he seemed to hear a wolf patting its feet against a door. He fought against himself. The doctor had explained the need for such a fight.

II

Up through the canal and past the burning coast of Arabia, the tatterdemalion of Port Said, and all the time, new scenes running in front of him, new people ; Southampton, with fierce rain falling until it hissed in the gutters, Simon on the wharf, looking through the rain-mist at the line of faces, hanging, like vellum masks, along the side of the boat, ' I can't see him, where is he ? ' Back again along the line, ' Yes, there he is, that still face, just below the second lifeboat.' Shyness and yet stronger than this, a sense of duty. He had done everything. Taxicab, train, all arranged, explanation to Customs man, and then the enormous gangway and the rush, and the rain coming down on policemen's capes, and stewards running one way, and then James Grantham in his large tweed coat, the nervous touching of hands, his fingers under his father's elbow, his father's face moving fantastically as if he wanted to kiss him and then the restraint which said, ' He is grown up ; not here,' the doctor in the background, ' Goodbye, and thank you so very, very much. We'll meet in London.' Rain in the scuppers, carrying cigarette ends and matches into the gurgling throat of a drain, little boys with brown telegram envelopes, shouting names, ' *Macnamara, Macnamara, Macnamara,*' ' *Leeming, Leeming, telegram for Leeming.*' And then the taxicabs, the rain making maps on the glass.

' I've brought my umbrella, you see. I

guessed what your weather would be like.' And Simon looked at him and smiled, and he saw a face which was old and tired and quiet, as if it had fought and suffered and passed through so many stages of development that it didn't bother to move into new expressions any more. The train, the rich green fields, wet, and the saturated farm buildings, their colour intensified by the rain. Another taxi, then, 'That's Big Ben, of course, isn't it, Simon? That's what postcards do for you,' and 'What a shame it's raining, the Life Guards in Whitehall will have their coats on,' and, 'But I know this place already, Simon. That's Westminster Abbey,' and, 'Oh, look, there's the sign *Downing Street*. Number 10, of course, and Nelson, what a height! And what is that?'

'That's the National Gallery.'

'Oh, yes, of course. Isn't it fun? I feel like a little boy at his first party. Simon, you are my father. The position is reversed. I feel as if I should call you Sir, and ask questions like you used to ask me, with that insistent "*But why*?" and my not being able to think of any answer but "*Because*." We're going to have plenty of time together, aren't we, Simon?'

'Oh, certainly. I'm educated quite enough. We're going to dash off to an opera to-night.'

'An opera!'

'Yes.'

'My dear boy! Covent Garden?'

'Yes.'

'But this is too wonderful.'

' It is *Thaïs*. An American I met in Scotland told me to read the book : well, I didn't, but when I saw the opera was being performed to-night I thought it would be a jolly good way of starting our debauch.'

' Debauch. What a lovely word.'

' Yes, it is going to be a debauch, father. But I *did* call you by your Christian name, didn't I ? Should respect increase or diminish as the years roll on ? If I am so much more sophisticated than you are, then I'll continue to call you James.'

' Then let it be James. But I won't have Jim. I couldn't bear that.'

They turned into the Strand, into a courtyard, and then the elaborate, rich hotel of Simon's choice swallowed them into its gilded mouth.

III

Paphnutius, the anchorite, praying in the noiseless desert, Thaïs, libertine of Alexandria, lovely, her hands heavy with rubies, emeralds and pearls ; Thaïs, lovely as a flamingo, by a pool ; Thaïs, with her soft cream body moving near the scented beards and groping, curious, male hands of the rich Alexandrians ; Thaïs, stripped of her glory, trembling before the story of the immaculate Jesus. The warm, golden star over Bethlehem. And then the libertine following Paphnutius into the desert, the blue shadows of night coming over the hills ; Thaïs, staining the sand of the desert with the blood of her lacerated feet ; Thaïs, under the

tamarisk tree, her nervous fingers clutching and finding God's hand in the infinity above the sand—

Thaïs, the singer, her voice ringing in the spaces of the theatre.

Simon had never known a great story before. The people of his books and plays were sophisticated marionettes in his memory. He had never seen so much beauty or known the tragedy of a figure, before whom all men would kneel and forget God.

James Grantham sat back in his seat, sometimes looking into the dark places of the theatre, from which strange illuminated blue mists seemed to emerge. He looked at Simon two or three times, and forgot the story of Thaïs to remember his own. The waves of music ran towards them like a celestial sea, moving among the vast heights of the Opera House, and the curtains of humanity, diaphanous, illusive, like a vision, the great shafts of light, yellow, purple and red coming from mechanical eyes away up in the roof. He looked at Simon's face outlined in the light, so that he could trace the line of his forehead and his nose and his heavy lips, parted—his eyes, watching the stage intently. He was very happy. He was with his son again and all was to be smooth companionship and entertainment like this.

Thaïs was dying. Simon wanted to press his mouth against her and put his arms about her and speak to her. He was a boy no longer, his strong feet left their imprint in the sand, he

was a rich man, self-assured, loving a woman such as this, not loving her in the richness of Alexandria, but here, alone—'Thaïs, *Thaïs*,' he almost called to her. Love was alive in him. His forefathers had made a new country. In the south they had stood up before the arctic winds, on the shores they had watched the great thundering waves. They had stood alone. Through their fortitude and their patience, Simon had been born, more a child of his country than the son of his father. The great hills, the new earth and the uncharted rivers were in the beating of his heart. Even now, with his quiet, nervous father beside him, he heard the winds ringing down the mountains, and the voices of those quiet, dull, virtuous people, busy about the village. Himself, untiring, and strong, walking on and on, the sun of the south burning his skin and making segments of light in his eyes, walking on to find a woman such as Thaïs.

As they went back to the hotel, his father talked of this and that and Simon listened and answered. Yet he saw nothing but Thaïs under the tamarisk tree, her remorse giving her pity and patience, and her vision of God making her so lovely that he would kiss the hem of her dress.

'I'm tired and I think I'll go to bed, Simon. This has been very, very wonderful for me.'

They walked among the garish luxuries of the hotel, the figures holding lamps, the orgies of pink and gilt, and Simon said, 'All right, if you really feel tired, but don't you want any-

thing before you go to bed, or we could have something sent up.'

'No, I am full of discipline. I have nothing before I go to bed.'

Simon went up to the room with him, and, while James Grantham untied his bow, took off his collar and pressed the tops of his pearl studs through the buttonholes of his shirt, they both said, 'what fun' it was 'being together again.'

'Awfully posh pyjamas, you've got.'

'Yes, they are rather dashing.'

'Gent's natty summer nightwear with a vengeance,' laughed Simon. Then they said goodnight and when he was half-way across the room, walking to the door, tenderness came to him. He turned back and went over to his father and kissed his cheek. 'I am so glad we are together again,' he said, and when he had closed the door, his father walked to the window and watched the mysterious river, and he said, 'Thank God, thank God,' over and over again.

Simon was tired but he avoided the quiet of his own bedroom. He was only vaguely conscious of what he had felt and known up to the earlier part of the day. Thinking was not a simple process for him. He had no intellectual trappings —philosophy, psychology or logic, to help him in arranging his thoughts and feelings into pigeonholes. He was instinctively if not actively religious. Licence and promiscuous sexual experiences were nauseating to him. He was not confused by the attractions of outward virtue. He saw in Thaïs, the woman of the story, some-

thing of what he might have felt, subconsciously, in living intimately with hills and rivers and the sea. He had become a new person in a few hours. And in the muddle of thoughts that came to him, crossing and inter-crossing like the strings in a game of cat's cradle, he was able to establish his conviction that the virtue of Thaïs was greater than the virtue of a young girl like Delphine, who was good through social fear rather than religious illumination. He knew that the saintliness of the dying Thaïs was achieved through experience of sin, knowledge and sorrow.

And the character of Thaïs was for him the character of the prima donna whose acting and singing and beauty had enthralled him so much that he did not applaud when the colossal curtains, like living things, swept down, to form a background for her at the edge of the stage, bowing, smiling and then withdrawing into the mystery of scenery and stairs and dressing rooms. He had walked out of the hotel, into the Strand, as he thought these things. He did not think that he was in love with the mythical Thaïs or the prima donna of the moment. He only knew that over all the dull, unmoving self that was in him there had rushed an uncontrollable tide—Thaïs had set it free—a tide of reason, a tide of consciousness that nothing one felt or thought was right unless it was linked in some way with God. And yet it was half-consciousness, this intruding spiritual hunger, for his equipment was not such that he could contemplate his own thoughts and feelings as fixed objects.

When love came to him it would not be in a moment such as when he was alone with Delphine, warm, willing, lovely Delphine. And he knew it would not be when he saw the first Thaïs of Alexandria, licentious and flamboyant. He wanted to stand on the fringe of the desert and kiss her feet and be a part of a trinity, himself worshipping the spirit of the woman, the spirit of the woman worshipping God. That was what surged within him. He went back into the hotel, among its great vulgar marble pillars, near the groups of pretty, careless people. He walked to a sofa, with its back turned to the illuminated floor, of tables and glass. He sat down. He pressed a bell in a pillar behind him and ordered a drink. He took the opera programme from his pocket and he read the story of Thaïs : a bald and unbeautiful narrative of facts. But he dressed them with his imagination—Thaïs, the libertine of Alexandria, lovely, her hands heavy with rubies, emeralds and pearls ; Thaïs stripped of her glory, seeing the warm golden star over Bethlehem. Thaïs following the anchorite into the desert, the blue shadows of night coming over the hills ; Thaïs staining the sand with the blood of her feet. Thaïs under the tamarisk tree, her nervous fingers clutching and finding God's hand in the infinity above the sand. Himself, Simon, with his hands and knees pressed into the sand, kissing her white feet, touching the hem of her robe.

# *BOOK TWO*

# CHAPTER I

## I

PATRICK SILVESTER wrote for subdued weekly journals, articles on tapestries he found, clocks, prints and the old houses he loved and knew. He had written two or three delicate books, one on carved jade, another on old snuff boxes. A few people had discovered the truth about him in these books. 'He just loves beautiful things,' they said, in their own fumbling way. For it was true that there was a serene tenderness in his way of touching a malachite box with emerald clasps, an ivory book with a monogram in platinum and pearls, or a box of lapis lazuli and filigree silver, such as some people feel when they touch a baby's cheek with their little finger.

He used to live on the Continent for eight months of the year. He was perfectly happy wandering from place to place. He knew the pictures, the drawings, the miniatures and the gems in the galleries and museums so well that when he came to the dignified quiet of some vast room, he would rush to a case to find some well-loved thing, a box, an ivory crucifix, a clock. He'd rest his hands on the wooden edge of the case and smile at the box or the cross or

the clock in a friendly, familiar way. The other four months of the year he stayed with friends in England, visiting them in their country houses, causing them to love him in a way that made them say, a month before he came, ' Oh, we'll leave the new paper and the chintz to Uncle Patrick. He's always got such wonderful taste.'

He was a loved tradition with their growing children, although he said many things they did not understand. He would bring books for the children, *Tales of a Grandfather* and, later, *The Vicar of Wakefield.* He would walk with them among the flower beds, picking dead pansy heads until his hands were full. These he would put in a little heap at the end of the walk. When he knew the children very well he told them a story, the story of a saintly Baron who lived in his castle on the Rhine.

The Baron believed in God : his faith was as a rock and he made his castle, his garden and his dependents into a beautiful and contented community. He had also a son who was spiritual and generous and clever, and once when this son was travelling in another country, a great Italian diplomat came to stay with the German Baron in his castle.

But the diplomat did not believe in God, and he said, ' How can I believe in what I do not see ? Show me God and I'll believe in Him. How can I believe in a superstition ? '

The Baron did not answer him. Together they walked through the big rooms of the castle

and in one of them the diplomat paused and said to the Baron, ' What a beautiful painting this is ! Who was the artist ? '

' My son painted that picture,' said the Baron.

From the castle they walked into the garden which was more lovely than any other garden beside the Rhine. The Italian stood on a terrace and saw the beds of flowers, the stretches of lawn and the lilies floating on still, gentle pools.

' I've never seen a garden as lovely as this. Who made it so beautiful ? '

' My son,' answered the Baron.

From the garden they walked down into the village, where they found the children, happy and diligent in their school.

' Who superintends this wonderful school ? ' asked the Italian diplomat.

' My son,' answered the Baron.

' Your son must be very clever—he must have a very beautiful character.'

The Baron smiled and said, ' How do you know this ? You have never seen my son.'

' Oh, I can see by the beautiful things he has made that he must be very clever.'

The Baron turned to him and said, ' It is through seeing the beautiful things that He has made that I know the character and beauty of God, just as you know the character and beauty of my son through his work, although he is travelling in a far-away country.'

When Patrick Silvester came to the end of

his story, he placed his hand on the child's shoulder and said, ' I hope that when you walk about this garden you'll think of God, Who makes all beautiful things.'

There was such simplicity and love in the way he spoke to children that they never felt uncomfortable or strange with him. They never moved uneasily on one foot or looked away. Their hearts were warm when they were with him, so that they picked flowers for him and touched his hands.

II

When he was forty-five, Patrick Silvester married a singing teacher in Paris. She, too, loved beautiful things and their little sitting-room, which looked out on to a busy, noisy courtyard, was filled with miniatures and little boxes, ivory toys, painted fans and many clocks. When pupils came to her, she always stopped their lesson just before the clocks struck.

' It is sixty o'clock at midday in Madame's studio,' they told their mothers or their friends, ' because she has so many clocks.'

Both Patrick Silvester and his wife loved their clocks so much that almost every hour they'd pause in their work, writing or sewing or tidying the little tables, and listen, first to the deep booming strike of a German clock, with an ivory face, upon which stars and moons were painted. Then would follow the striking of a little *Empire* clock. It had a gilt lion's mouth from which a revolving piece of glass

descended into a gilt shell bowl so that it looked like a jet of running water. Very little girls who came to Madame Silvester's for their lessons, wondered where all the water came from. This clock made an excited and querulous sound which was always followed by the striking of a rosewood grandfather clock, which stood near the piano. There was a little travelling clock made of silver, with a ring of garnets around its face, and there was another with a blacksmith framed below the dial, a blacksmith with an anvil and a hammer. With every chime the blacksmith raised the hammer and brought it down on the anvil. All these things happened every hour, and Patrick Silvester would smile at his wife, and she would smile at him, because the pleasure of the sounds never diminished for them.

When Judith Silvester was born, Patrick and his wife worked more diligently. He wrote a new book and more articles and Madame Silvester took five new pupils recommended by the Manager of the Opéra Comique, all to provide their baby with delicate, silken things they both loved to touch.

Madame Silvester died when Judith was three years old. So Judith and her father lived alone in the three rooms, the three rooms with their windows looking out on the courtyard.

But their world was not confined to the hundred windows which looked down into the flagged yard, across which men walked in their clattering sabots. When the sun was warm,

filling the spacious gardens with silver light, they walked among the trees or sat upon the garden seats. Patrick Silvester would read a book, but first he would draw large squares in the dust so that Judith could play hopscotch.

'Have you brought the block, daddy?'

He would shake his pockets. 'Dear me, I must have forgotten it! How stupid of me!'

'Oh, oh! I can't play.'

'Ah, here it is! It was there all the time.'

Sometimes they made *the expedition.*

'Seeing it's a very fine day, Judie, we might go and see the vizier.'

They walked along streets and across gardens and turned corners until they were under the vast loins of the Eiffel Tower. But the Eiffel Tower was not the vizier, nor the goal of their expedition. Once Patrick brought Judith to the gardens to read her a story about a vizier, who ate three whole chickens for breakfast. They were sitting in a sheltered place, with their backs turned towards the Tower, and he read to her—

> 'The Vizier washed his chickens down with purple wine, and by and by he fell asleep, nodding his feathery plumes as his head fell on to his chest.'

Judith looked across the grass towards the only clump of pampas that grew in the gardens. She saw the pampas blooms nodding in the sunlight.

'Look, daddy, aren't those like the vizier's plumes?'

' My darling, of course they are, how clever ! '

Thus the occasional journeys to the gardens beneath the tower became expeditions for fine days, when they went to call on the vizier. Even her English governess was not told of these grand, important secrets between them.

During the days of summer, when there were hundreds of people on the lawns, Judith learned about the great world that moved outside their courtyard. Her father told her stories, stories of the operas, of Carmen and Aïda, and stories from the Nibelungenlied. These were so real that she saw the people in the garden as figures in an opera : the girl with the yellow gloves who sat on a garden seat to smoke cigarettes, which she finally scrunched into the gravel under her foot, the woman in black who yawned and took off her hat. The little girl in the yellow wicker goat cart, the stream of people at the foot of the Tower, the engineers with their furnace and their red-hot, spitting rivets, which they hammered into the great girders.

But when it rained, Judith stayed at home. She loved their sitting room, with the butter-coloured walls, the tall grey doors and the old Turkey carpet. Her father's collection of snuff boxes and clocks and little china dogs and musical boxes, and the birds of paradise under the glass shade, made the room seem like a shop, but a shop with its doors always closed, because the owner loved his things too much to sell them. Here Judith grew to the

consciousness and knowledge of her tenth year. She had her governess who came every morning, and her books of English nursery rhymes, and when she was not reading them, she stood at the window and looked out into the courtyard. There was a musical man who played the cornet and the banjo.

'Judie, Judie, there's that wicked man again,' her father said, from the table where he was writing.

'Oh, daddy, shall I tell him to stop?'

'No, he'd never hear you above his own noise.'

When he was older and when Judith was able to read her books by herself, he put plugs of cottonwool in his ears so that he had to say, 'Eh? What's that? Ah, yes,' when Judith told him it was one o'clock and time for lunch.

Six seamstresses sat at one of the windows, a window in the wall that missed the sunlight. When she was old enough to look over the balustrade, Judith waved her hand to the seamstresses and they waved to her. Sometimes one of them would come out on to the little balcony and stretch a piece of newspaper on the railing. In her hand would be a pair of wet silk stockings. From her mouth she would take a pin to secure them to the railing, while they were drying. Judith thought the flapping pink things looked like the skins of somebody's legs—as if they'd left them behind in a moment of extreme forgetfulness. The persistent rumble of the streets was muted

when it came to Judith in the room, but sometimes she heard the bells on the horses, and she thought of her picture book where there was a sleigh on a white road in St. Petersburg.

Every morning when the chambermaid brought in their breakfast, there was *café au lait* for her father, *chocolat* for Judith and *croissants* for both of them. Once Judith said, ' Daddy, isn't that like the cow's crumpled horn in the story ? '

' How, my dear ? What do you mean ? '

Judith picked up the *croissant* in her hands and held it against her forehead. ' See, daddy, I'm the cow with the crumpled horn that tossed the maiden all forlorn.'

' My wonderful child—how you are developing. Put on your ochre jacket and I'll take you to a splendid lunch.'

They went to a café with swinging glass doors and Judith wore her ochre velvet jacket with the black braid. They sat in the café and watched the world outside, green 'buses, red motor cars, shattered, trundling taxis, and *poilus* walking past in their flapping blue uniforms. Judith drank her syrup from a gold-edged glass. In the centre of the table there were straws in a blue vase. A little boy stood in front of them, with two little birds sitting on his finger. He passed a stick under their feet and they stepped on to it. He moved the stick in a circle, then he brought it back, near his finger, to which the birds stepped obediently. They were very small and they had yellow waistcoats and brown jackets, with red lapels.

'Would you like them in a cage at home, Judie?'

'Oh, daddy, yes.'

'You'd be good to them and always feed them?'

'Yes, daddy.'

So Patrick Silvester bought the little birds. Judith carried the wooden cage, carefully, and they walked down the boulevard together, past the leafless trees, with lacy twigs that hung like giant spider webs against the sky.

III

When Judith was eighteen, she sang her first small part in Louise at the Opéra Comique. Singing teachers, rehearsals, a tour of the small towns, and the shadows, the lights, the colour and the excitement of the opera house gave her a second world for thought and development. But her love for her father and the rooms in which they lived was never disturbed. The theatre was never more than a medium through which she expressed the love and interests which held them together. Their conversation was full of affectionate, intimate symbols and references and confidences, which excluded almost every other living person. While she was a pupil, they went to the operas two or three nights a week, until she felt like an abstract figure, moving through the plots of Louise and Thaïs and Carmen and Tosca. Judith sang the songs of the operas they both knew, and together they searched for details of costume in

old books, and discussed the subtle purpose of phrases, discovering the composer's intention and developing an affinity with the music which made the operas their own peculiar possession. Judith was dark and beautiful. When in the third act of Louise, she stood up from the medley of sewing tables to sing her song, the people in the stalls said, 'This new one, she is very beautiful,' before they said, 'She has a voice.' Her singing enriched her beauty. The quiet love which had made her life never escaped her, and when she was applauded, the applause was not all because of her singing and her beauty, but also for a quality of character which illuminated her expression and her voice.

Her father had listened to her from a seat in the stalls. But when her song was over, he came behind the stage and kissed her and held her hands. He felt warm and old and mellow and pleased, as she turned to her friends and said, 'This is my father, Signor Amadio. This is my father, Mademoiselle Mita.'

She put her hand through his arm as if the success belonged to both of them. The manager—he had come up to them, as they stood among the fantastic shadows of the wings. 'We'll make a prima donna of her yet, Monsieur Silvester. She'll be singing in the Metropolitan Opera House in New York and making a fortune before either of us is in his grave.' And the property men who had been carrying off the little tables, and Madame

Cavali who was Louise came up to them, still holding the dress she had been sewing on the stage. ' Marvellous, marvellous, Mademoiselle Silver. Oh, I was so pleased. It was the first part I ever sang and I felt for you all the time.'

The orchestra started, the stage was set again and Patrick Silvester went back to his stall. When it was over, when the last excited scene had poured on to the climax, ' *Paris, Paris, oh ! l'attirante, la chère musique de la grande ville* ! . . . ' he went round to her again and together they went into the wet street, and into the black peace of a taxicab, which took them towards a café.

' Judie, darling, are you quite sure you don't want to go with the others. It is dull to come away like this, isn't it ? '

' Don't be silly, daddy. Actually, I'd far sooner go straight home.'

So he leaned out of the taxicab window and called to the man and they changed their direction. Within ten minutes Judith was standing by the window in their sitting room, taking off her cloak. Many of the windows looking down into the courtyard were still illuminated. Some people were laughing, and the musical man was playing his banjo. When she leaned out she could see great cloud shapes moving past, obliterating the moon, and for a moment she sang under her breath, ' *Paris, Paris. Oh ! l'attirante, la chère musique de la grande ville ! . . .* '

Her father sat down. He was tired. She

went across to him and touched his hair and his cheek with the back of her hand. She was afraid and tired, and when she placed her hand like that, with the palm on his cheek, she felt warm and secure. They opened a bottle of claret and spread *pâté de foie gras* on biscuits. Judith ate the breast of a chicken. They sat opposite each other, their hands moving this way and that way above the white cloth. When he said, ' No heel taps, Judie,' and when she had thrown her neck back in obedience, until the glass was almost upside down, their hands, with nothing left to do, touched across the table. Judith took his old hand between hers and played with it. She separated the fingers. Then she bent them, and Patrick Silvester smiled. She twisted his cabochon sapphire ring, round and round, and then lifting his hand, she kissed each of his finger-tips, as if he were a little baby.

' I am very proud of you, Judie—so very pleased and proud.'

' Oh, it doesn't really mean very much, daddy. It is only a beginning.'

' Yes, but we all know now—we know that you'll have success after success. You were very wonderful, my child, I can say that with a feeling—well—in a detached way. I suppose being with you made me take everything as a matter of course. But you sang some of those phrases in a way that made me wonder whether I'd not been a fool—whether I had not missed

some quality in you, through a sort of blindness of my own.'

'Don't be silly. Every quality I've got has been put in me by you. You know that. I thought of you all the time. I sang for you—I hoped you'd know, darling daddy. But we mustn't talk any more. We must go to bed, because you are tired and I am tired.'

They said goodnight and Judith went to her room. Just before her father opened the door, the clocks in the room chimed *one*. The German clock boomed, the blacksmith raised his hammer. Something whirred in the forge behind him, and then he lowered the hammer on to the anvil.

The musical man had put his banjo into a big black box and the courtyard was quiet.

## IV

Judith stayed in her room until midday. She lay in bed, with a half-sense of tiredness, creating changing and twisted pictures—her dressing room with a long line of dresses hung on pegs, looking like beheaded girls ; the gas jets, the mirrors, the film of white powder upon everything about her table, the unending days in all seasons when she had crossed the river for her lessons, sometimes feeling afraid of her own weakness, sometimes feeling that her voice was a chord that bound her to God. Her father had taught her that nothing great was ever done except through faith and belief in God. Her knowledge of God was so personal and her

conception of Him so natural that her singing teacher had once been surprised and shocked when she spoke of Him in a familiar sort of way. She believed, too, that painting or writing or singing could not be good unless it was in some way a praise of God.

She turned on her side in bed, so that her hands were together near her face, and as her sleepiness left her, as she awakened to fuller consciousness of the day, she pressed her hands together and made a prayer of gratitude for her contentment, the love of her father and last night's success, which was to make her life still more wonderful.

There was too much noise in the courtyard for her to sleep any more. Clattering sabots on the flagstones, the seamstresses—not the same seamstresses as she had known as a little girl, when she used to rest her chin on the iron balustrade. The rhythmic chatter of sewing machines. She dressed and opened the door of the sitting room.

'Daddy, daddy—where are you? What a pig not to come and say good-morning.'

But he had fallen from his chair. A half-written word ended in a chaotic splutter on the writing pad. Among his papers she found a letter addressed to her. He said:

My Darling Judie,

Some day I shall die very suddenly because the doctor has told me about my heart. So I am writing you this letter in case it should all happen so suddenly that we don't say good-bye.

You have always been my little sweetheart, and I am not afraid to die and leave you because we both believe in God and His goodness, and I know He will love you and take care of you in my place.

This is the last letter I shall ever write to you, my lovely daughter. And yet there is very little for me to write. Many things will happen to you when you are alone, and when my love is withdrawn from your life, somebody else will come to you and say that they love you. And when that somebody comes, I want you to remember this—because in remembering it you will assure your happiness—I want you to remember that you must make no step in life except on the basis of truth, and the truth on which love is built is that the love must involve three people and not two. And the third Person is God.

We have proved the greatness of love. But we did not prove this by ourselves. Always God has been with us in our little room, and in the adventure of our lives together. And just as He made our life beautiful, so must He come to you when another kind of love—a romantic love, enters your life. No true love is unconscious of God. Unless your love goes through another being, to God ; unless you can take your love to the confessional and feel that it is a trinity, then it is not love. For it must be a trinity, dear Judie, a bond between yourself, the man who will love you and God.

And that is all I have to tell you, my dearest Judie, because everything else I could tell you, you already know. . . .

## CHAPTER II

### I

JUDITH SILVESTER, who had become Judith Silver of the Opera, lived in the rooms across the river for eight years after her father died. Sometimes she travelled south to sing, once to Berlin and one winter she sang two rôles with the Opera in Rome. When she was away, her rooms in Paris were locked up and undisturbed, except when the concierge went in once a week to wind the clocks.

She didn't rise to fame quickly or brilliantly. But there was a night when the critics recognised her qualities as a singer and an actress. One of them said, 'Her Thaïs is a thing of Heaven. Her singing and acting have a religious beauty which enriches Massenet's undistinguished opera.' Musicians with old experience said that there was religious essence in every rôle she played. But she remained curiously remote from the influences of the opera and the singers and the theatre itself.

Judith had grown tall. Her shoulders and her arms and her black hair were beautiful, and her expression was calm ; her eyes steady and sad. Old men who moved about the theatre said, 'She has Duse's hands.' In talking

to her, they watched the movements of her hands even more than her eyes—when they moved over a table, when she touched her hair, when, at rehearsals, she extended her hands or pressed them against her breast, the people who played with her watched them—'There is more expression in her hands than her face,' they said. They loved her but they never comprehended her. They were afraid of her goodness. Lascivious Jews and unreligious people who surrounded her were afraid of her judgment: they instinctively sheltered her from coarse adjectives and vulgar witticism. Her presence softened the voices of stage directors; grinning impresarios made their mouths rigid, then benign, when they spoke to her.

She approached her work in an ecstasy, which did not allow her to consider the other artists as human beings, the theatre as a background for her life. In studying a rôle, she became passive so that the action and character became her action and character.

She proved that the spirit of any relationship is decided by the strongest character, for in her contacts with the managers and singers, she was so calm and impersonal and patient, that they created the same nature in themselves, to respond to her. She was so conscientious and intense in her work that she was safe from the anger of the managers.

Only once was this serene relationship disturbed.

Men did not talk about her among themselves. She came to represent a standard of thought and work and morality to them. Having no place in her social life, they accepted her standards and the incidents of her life as being remote from the idle curiosity and gossip of their conversation.

But Philippe Feydeau, who was an unscrupulous *roué*, was naturally armed against her aloofness. He found immorality to be very easy ; so easy among people who were dependent on him for success that he became a lazy *roué* who made no effort to break down barriers of virtue when he met them. He was a heavy man with a bulbous, corrugated body. He breathed in asthmatic hisses and his hands were fat and brown. They looked like enormous toads, resting on his knees. On his first finger he wore a gold snake with diamond eyes, a big ruby, and an effeminate ring of cats' eyes and pearls. He spat frequently into a magenta silk handkerchief. He neither loved Judith nor even contemplated her as prospective prey. His laziness forbade the effort. It was easier with the others. The contract on the table, the quibbling, and then the formula :

'And what is your ambition, my child ? '

' Oh, Monsieur Feydeau, I want to play Louise.'

' Aha, but Louise was an immoral little girl.'

The singer would smile then.

Then he would curl his fat finger and touch

her under the chin. 'And I am sure this little girl is not going to be like Louise, eh?'

'Oh, Monsieur Feydeau.'

'Ha, ha, we shall see, and now it is almost time that this good little girl went home.'

He would take her away then, in his car, and from then on, assured of his success, he would suggest supper. He would become confident and revolting and broad and loud. Without thinking, he knew that Judith would not be disturbed by his lazy game. But there came a night when a thin satanic Italian sat in his office. He had come from the Scala to find a new Tosca.

'We hear great stories of your success with the ladies, Monsieur Feydeau—great stories. I had hoped—'

Monsieur Feydeau enjoyed his reputation. 'Ah, they are all accessible, they are all accessible.'

The Italian slid his thumb and forefinger along the edges of a paper knife. Then he tapped the backs of his nails on the ivory. 'Except Madame Silver, Monsieur Feydeau. You have not conquered there.'

'A matter of opportunity, my friend. I am sure I could if I chose.'

'Ah, no, Monsieur Feydeau, not Madame Silver, she is remote from such games.'

Philippe Feydeau thought intermittently for two or three days after this. He would make an effort. He was Philippe Feydeau, respected and feared—more feared than respected, per-

haps, but that did not matter. Pretty girls forgot the word 'No' when they were with him. He confided his ambition to his manager who had often been his procurer. And the manager was a man who gossiped, so he told Judith's secretary, and, half because of the dramatic possibilities of such a piece of gossip, and half because they hated Feydeau's self-assurance, they allowed their imagination to play with Feydeau's ambition and eventually Judith herself was told the story. Her secretary came to her. 'Madame, I am torn between my duty to you and my respect for the conventions which you inspire me to observe.' He was a little man of pompous phrases. 'Madame Silver, I trust I have your confidence, I want you to trust me and let me warn you of Monsieur Feydeau. Madame, he is a Casanova of the suburbs, and his advances are as frequent as they are superficial. Madame, I trust you will not dislike what I have to say. He has mentioned your name in a way of which I do not approve.'

Judith was in her dressing room. She smiled at the little man, 'My good Monsieur Martin, I appreciate what you say but I am not afraid of anything Monsieur Feydeau might say about me. And I am sure he could have nothing but kind feelings and respect for me. Monsieur Martin, I never make gossip, nor do I encourage gossip, and while I understand the motive behind your warning, I must ask you never to talk of this again. I can only ask you

not to talk of it to anybody else. You would hurt me if you did so.' She had turned to him then and her smile had been indulgent and friendly.

Nevertheless, Philippe Feydeau sent her a large box of gardenias. He came to her dressing room and hoped it was not draughty, and that the water was always hot. Almost every night, he came to congratulate her. 'Marvellous, Madame Silver, marvellous,' he would say. 'You make the opera great and it is not really great itself.' One night there was a pungent thick fog in the streets and Judith's car was not waiting for her when she came up to the stage door. Feydeau had watched for his opportunity and, when it came, there he was, grinning and charming in his common way, offering to drive her back to her flat. Judith knew then that he was attempting to justify his boast. But she was neither nervous nor self-conscious as she stepped into the car.

'It is very kind of you, Monsieur Feydeau. I don't know what has happened to Edmond. It is the fog.'

Philippe Feydeau had followed her into the car and for a moment they both sat back. His big hands in white gloves, were spread on his legs. Judith was tired. She knew that he was staring at her, so she looked out of the window, through the fog, at the ghostly figures that swung into view and then away again, like misshapen fish swimming in an aquarium of murky water. Feydeau moved uneasily.

He shifted his hands, tapping his white forefinger on his hands.

'You are tired, I know, Madame Silver. It is so miserable . . . this. You would say "no" if I suggested supper. I know you would say "no".'

'Oh, Monsieur Feydeau. It is not that, but I never go to supper. It is only because I am always tired after I have been singing.'

'No, no, I understand.'

His mind urged his hands to move—he was unconscious of the muscular action. She smelled different from anybody else he had known. Her clothes, her eyes, her manner—they made no attempt at attraction of the kind he knew. But he wanted to touch her hair. There was nothing definitely vicious in his obsession. In the two weeks during which he had developed his ambition, this desire to touch her had tantalized him. He moved one hand towards her. It wavered and then advanced until it closed over her wrist. Then he moved his hand until he could feel the hardness of her rings against his palms.

She did not move.

'This is the first time we have been alone like this for a long time, Madame Silver.' He pressed her hand but she did not take it away. She was not angry, nor was she offended. She was sorry for him because of his blundering self-consciousness. She thought quickly. She would give him credit for a greater instinct than he possessed.

' Yes, Monsieur Feydeau. And I appreciate the friendly sympathy of your hand, your hand in friendship. I know how noble is your intention towards me. I have always known in the theatre, your kindness, Monsieur Feydeau. You have always been my friend, because my father asked that you should, Monsieur Feydeau. I have known that.'

Her voice was calm. She turned to him and smiled and there grew in him an impulse he had never possessed. He drew his hand away slowly. She had expressed faith in his goodness and in his friendship. He was good. Of course. This saintly woman. He had blundered. Yet it had been nothing but a passing fancy—considering her otherwise. In all his life, people had never misunderstood his intentions like this. They had never mistaken his evil for virtue. Judith guessed what was happening in his mind and she did not choose the wrong moment when she said, ' Monsieur Feydeau, I will come to supper with you if I may. Just some quiet place.'

' Oh, that would be so kind of you.' He spoke like a boy now, eagerly, and to himself he said, ' No, not the Ritz, people there know me. They'd think she was one of the long procession. No, I can't hurt her like that. Nobody must ever think any evil of her coming to supper with me.'

They went to a quiet place. His heavy face broke into new, fantastic smiles as they ate their supper. He watched her hands—he

looked straight into her eyes as he spoke. But there was no emotion in his admiration. He was elated in a calm way and moved to a tenderness he had never known in all his life.

'You are happy with us, Madame Silver—You must always know I would do anything for you to make you comfortable and happy.'

'Of course, I am happy, Monsieur Feydeau. I only want to justify the faith you put in me when you gave me the rôles in the first place.'

'We could not help it. You deserved them and that is why you got them. I am very proud that I was the first person to make you a prima donna.'

'I am proud, too. I love my work very much—it is the only thing I love now. My father was a great man, Monsieur Feydeau. I have few friends because they would always seem so little compared with my father. You know, Monsieur Feydeau, he was the happiest man in the world.'

Suddenly Philippe Feydeau realised that he had never been happy.

When he went home, he did not stop in front of the lime-green door with the silver knocker. It was behind that that Caroline was asleep—she had lived with him for almost a year now. Usually he went in, even if only to kiss her as she slept. But no, not to-night. He walked to his own room and undressed slowly. Before he got into bed he hesitated. Some instinct made his knees bend just a little. But his mind did not respond; he did not

kneel. If the instinct had been conveyed to his mind he would have crumpled on to the floor, but his character was too old and set—he stumbled into bed and turned out the light. 'Judith Silver,' he said, 'Judith Silver,' and then he thought of what she had said. 'My father was the happiest man in the world.' He had never been happy. But then, he had never been discontented like this—she had not rebuffed him—she had just misunderstood him—she must know his reputation. Yet, she had credited him with an instinct for goodness and friendship, even when it was not there. 'Beautiful Judith Silver,' he said, and he tried to make a prayer. He did not know it was a prayer. He did not say 'God.' He did not think 'God.' But he floundered in a large dark space, looking for a chink through which light might burst in upon him.

II

Judith had moved her father's writing table from the window and over it she had spread a heavy Italian embroidery of gigantic magenta carnations, on a mauve background. On this were two crystal candlesticks with silver sconces, the German clock and a large malachite and silver box. She did not wish her father's table to be bare and unused, day after day. She did not allow herself the morbid indulgence of too much death-worship. The room was almost the same, eight years after, as it was on the wet afternoon when they had carried her father's

coffin down the twisting stairs. He had been buried in the country—Judith went alone with the priest—to the outskirts of the city, and then beyond, to a village he had known and loved. They went in a black cab, the hearse visible in front of them. She had not cried. She was surprised by her own calm—her consciousness of the landscape, the fields with white fowls pecking in the grass, and the workers passing on the road, and men bending their backs under big sacks of potatoes. In one place she had seen a young peasant walking up towards the gate, along a path between two plantations of red cabbages. He was carrying a pallid plucked turkey on a blue plate. The simple quiet of the scene would have pleased her father. She almost turned to tell him to look. Then she remembered the priest and the hearse. She looked out of the window again and saw a field full of immense golden pumpkins, their leaves and stalks rotted away. They looked like moons, fallen on to the brown soil.

She thought all these things—the cab and the fields and the golden pumpkins and the peasant among the red cabbages when she went into her sitting-room, on the night she went to supper with Philippe Feydeau. Tolerance and sympathy and one of her father's laws of love had made her kind to him, 'Judy, you never achieve any good in this world by establishing your own self-respect. It is only by making other people feel that they are good and noble that you can help them. You can only esta-

blish your own goodness and nobility through them,' had caused her to forget any revulsion she felt over Philippe Feydeau. She had no definite desire for love. But when she half thought of love and its possible approach to her, she forgot the opera and the people of the theatre. Once when she was singing,

> ' *Quelle musique dira l'émerveillement de mes yeux quand tu viens à paraître, dans le soleil, souriante ! . . . Une madone de Vinci ne sourit pas ainsi,*'

had awakened a picture which stayed in her mind as she sang all through the second scene. She wondered if anybody would ever speak to her in that way, and to-night, thinking thus again, she knew that if love came in the trappings of Philippe Feydeau or in any such guise, it would not disturb her.

She thought again of the black cab, of the fields and of the young peasant walking up towards the gate, carrying a blue plate on his bare arms.

That thought passed, and before she went to bed, she sat in the chair and half prayed and half talked. ' Oh, Lord, make love an unselfish thing for me, because I have seen what selfish love has done for other people, and I would sooner grow old and never have love than accept the substitute Philippe Feydeau has accepted. Oh, Lord, make me so strong in myself and so strong in my faith in You that when it does come I may remember what my daddy told me—that I may sit here and talk about it to You.'

III

Two weeks after the night when Judith went to supper with Philippe Feydeau, he fell ill and was taken to his home. Judith's secretary told her just before she went on to the stage. 'I don't think it is very important, Madame Silver.'

'While I am on the stage, will you take my car and go to my rooms. You will find two new books on a table—I think they are on the same table as the black wedgewood bowl—bring them back here and get some flowers—some mauve orchids if you can—and I will send them to him to-night, so that they will be there very early in the morning. Ask how he is and let me know when you come back.'

When Judith came off the stage at the end of the opera, she found the chorus girls in a fever of excitement. But she did not wait. She went to her dressing-room. Monsieur Martin was speaking excitedly at the telephone.

'Oh, madame, madame, this is terrible. Monsieur Feydeau—he is very ill. Madame, the doctors have telephoned to say he has called for you all night.'

Judith changed her clothes quickly, and gave instructions to Martin. 'Ring up my rooms and say I will be late. Go to the stage manager and say I will not rehearse to-morrow morning.' She went through the stage door and stepped into her car.

IV

Philippe Feydeau died of pneumonia, after being in bed for two weeks. Every day Judith went to him, up the jade and grey staircase, into the fantastic room where he slept. His was a room of seduction and opulence—a room panelled in mauve silk—a long room, with a purple carpet, a chandelier like a fountain of golden liquid bursting from the ceiling, sofas, incense burners, cynical bronze Buddhas, marble girls on pedestals, an ivory girl and boy twisted and close to each other, near the bed. On the bed, with its gold and mauve curtains and its posts crowned with white ostrich feathers, lay Philippe Feydeau—like a slug among the petals of a rose. On one side of the bed was a buhl cabinet and in its drawers were photographs he had bought in Port Said, a book of fantastic Japanese prints, tubes of German medicines, cantharides—a conglomeration of the *roué's* filth. In a small case, near the bed, were volumes of Casanova's adventures, *Rabelais*, *The Decameron*, an edition of *Petronius* with coloured illustrations, and books of photographs he had bought from cringing dealers who knew his tastes.

Judith came to him each afternoon. When she was away he lay in silence. The calm of dying fogged his mind and his expression did not change. His skin was blotched, like faded snake skin, and his thin hair was untidy, showing little strips of bloodless scalp. Some-

times he said, ' Saint Judith,' to himself and moved his hands under the clothes until they lay together, on his breast. Paris moaned outside. When Judith came, she sat by him—she whispered the story of last night's success and when he moved his hand above the cover, she touched him—' Dear Monsieur Feydeau, do not be disturbed. Everything will be well with you. We must wait and be patient.'

' Ah, no, I am going to die. And it is better I should, Madame Silver—I have been an evil man. I have done no good in the world. I have taken more than I have given—you talked of God's lenience yesterday—it is His lenience that allows you to come to me like this.'

' No—I am here because I am your friend—it is because I want to be here.'

She touched his hand again and as she looked at him she prayed, so that her revulsion left her and she saw him as a child, a pathetic thing needing love—' love must be given according to another's need, not one's own,' her father had said.

Philippe Feydeau watched her calm, lovely face. ' I suppose it is God who makes you look like that—Saint Judith,' he said.

' Oh, you must not say that, oh, no. I am not that—only be quiet and trust. Oh, Monsieur Feydeau, I don't want to be sanctimonious to you—but all those simple things we were told long ago—God the Father from whom we may receive forgiveness—forgiveness and

Divine Grace—oh, Monsieur Feydeau—it is not a narrowing thing to accept—it is so broad and lovely and calm. God is such a romantic quest. He is no tyrant—His love and His humour and His patience—the warmth of knowing Him—Monsieur Feydeau, if I seem to mean anything to you now—it is because I am praying all the time—God is filling me with power which is not my own—He is so near to both of us.'

'I have done so much evil—oh—Saint Judith—your hand on mine—look—the skin—the colour—I know—the lily and the snake. God can have nothing for me. I have said "no" always. I have forgotten how to pray. He is away from me. I am all evil.'

'Ah, no, no—no one is all evil. The man who steals—he is a thief for only a minute of his day—all the other time—he may be kind, he may have great triumphs within himself. No one word describes him. He is a thief only because that is what the world has discovered about him. We never know what strange forces guide him, struggle for possession of him all the time he is not a thief. And you have done so much good; music you have given people, beauty, to compensate for what else you have done. God reckons these things. He is not a sentimentalist. He is a wise mystery. He asks for faith—faith—Love that is given to men is given to Him.'

Judith moved from the chair and knelt beside

his bed. ' Oh, God,' she prayed, ' use me now as Your servant. Make my mind and my heart so strong that I may feed him with what he needs ; and only in as much as it is wise in Your judgment.'

Philippe Feydeau touched her hair. When she stood up again he spoke. ' I think I know now, it is seeing God through you. That is what I have never done. I have sought people for themselves. I have never seen beyond them. You are the Saint through which I find something else. Isn't there something about a Trinity in your religion? This is a sort of Trinity. I love you and because my love is right, I see something else through you. You are the window through which I see God.'

Judith prayed still—sitting by him, her hands clasped on the mauve silk bed cover.

' I think I know now—Saint Judith—I think I know—but I—I— ' He was silent. She waited a long time. He was still and his eyes were closed. His breathing became even and quiet. He was asleep. She knelt down again and God was so near to her, her closed eyes saw a silver cross in a haze and a wreath and seemed to press on her head and fill her with an ecstasy she had never known before.

When Judith came to the mauve room again, Philippe Feydeau was dead. The nurse had left him, asleep. When she came back, he was lying by the window, an open window through which there came a great wind, blowing the curtains about, like flags, sending papers and

lace mats scurrying across the floor. He had crawled out of bed. He had opened the window and into the courtyard he had thrown books and bottles, and the ivory boy and girl. Some children had been playing there and they told everybody about the falling things, how they ran into the concierge's room to watch through the window, the books and the marble girl and the bottles and an empty drawer. When the concierge saw these things he put them into a great basket.

They closed the window and carried him to the bed. It was then that Judith came. 'Madame—he is dead—the notary came this morning and the priest, your friend, Madame. I left him to sleep. I thought he was so much better. I left him to be peaceful and when I came back, oh, Madame, he was cold on the floor. It was not my wilful neglect. And he has torn things, see, the bureau, the books, everywhere. God rest his soul. I try to be a good Catholic, Madame—I'll pray for him, Madame—Madame understands—he is with God.'

## CHAPTER III

### I

Her dresser had pinned the telegrams together so that they made two irregular pink panels, one on either side of the mirror in her dressing-room. None of her Paris friends had forgotten her : strange, ecstatic telegrams to read in London. The opera was ' Thaïs.' Her dresser spoke to her in French. It was not easy to realise that this was London, and this Covent Garden. Yet, she had seen the vegetables, limp, green things, and the heavy breasted Cockney women with their black straw hats and shawls.

But it would be the same. Already she could hear the music of the opening scene. She would go down and find the same valley of haze in front of the stage. And in front of the haze, rising and falling, the white hands of the violin players and the white gut of the bows, like flecks of foam on a vague sea. Paris did not seem to be so very far away, Paris, nor Philippe Feydeau's wind-torn room and the litter of papers on which he had written half-finished sentences.

' They are for you,' the notary had said.

'Your name is on them. He must have been very weak when he wrote them.'

'Saint Judith, I close my eyes and I can smell you as if you were in the room,' he had written.

And on another sheet, 'When you knelt down beside my bed, I seemed to feel a great hand touch me, and I think it was then that this peace came to me.' But at the bottom he had written, in gaunt letters that seemed to suffer, 'God bless you, Saint Judith.'

She had folded them quickly and put them in her bag.

And now, Alexandria and the theatre and the desert and the vast distances of the opera house. The people waiting, their faces in a fog, and the burning lights coming down from the top of the theatre in shafts of red, blue, and amber. When she opened the door of her dressing-room, the music that had seemed far away became a surge that drew her on to the stage. When she sang, she found a new strength that made her dominate the painted scene. She imagined herself as a boat moving out courageously over that hazy sea, the foam of white hands and violin bows coming up to her, the notes of the violins like drops of splashing silver, and the deep, male dirge of the 'cellos, lifting her voice and holding it, on through the great story, scene upon scene, pageant upon pageant, and then herself standing in the desert, lifting her arms to the spaces above her.

That funny little man in the wings. 'Oh,

Madame Silver, I have heard you everywhere, but nowhere like this.' Her dresser, crying, and ugly when she cried, ' They all love you. Oh, did you hear the applause, can you hear it now,' and then the men outside her dressing-room.

' But you must come once more. They won't leave the theatre.'

Her brain remained perfectly still. She ran down the steps automatically, and then across the stage and out between the curtains, the curtains that moved and breathed. The clapping hands and the voices, and herself, still in the little room in Paris, and the blacksmith raising his hammer and striking twelve o'clock, and her father, with his cabochon sapphire ring, and down the steps again and across the silent, empty stage, the vast grey heights into which the scenery had withdrawn, her hands being kissed, her dressing-room again, the stage door, some people cheering. Then the warm closed-in safety of the car, down into the Strand, and to her hotel.

II

Important people from the Opera House entertained Judith at supper. Somebody—she suspected Monsieur Martin—had told the English managers that she was a mild gourmet and she had been asked to order the supper herself. Mushroom soup, with rafts of whipped cream, each flecked with red pepper. Then

breasts of chicken, stewed in champagne, a salad, and avocada pears and a dressing flavoured with camembert cheese. It was a supper of small talk and congratulations, friendly acknowledgment of her success, unjealous interest in her personality.

She wore an ivory velvet dress, undecorated, making her look perhaps old fashioned. On the shoulder was a rose, cut out of a solid piece of amethyst, with jade leaves.

'Madame Silver, you were wonderful. No *Thaïs* has ever held us like that. You make her so much greater than Massenet did himself.'

And then from the smiling, genial Italian conductor, who had been with her in Vienna and Paris, 'Ah, we always say in Paris that Madame Silver has changed *Thaïs* from a second rate opera into a first rate opera.'

People came up to be introduced to her. She was pleased to escape from the supper-room, with its cornices, gilt, chandeliers and plaster muses, grouped in Adams panels.

She lifted her long white gloves from a chair.

'Goodnight.'

'Amazing, Madame Silver!'

'One of Covent Garden's greatest nights.'

'I cannot begin to describe what I feel.'

And then she crossed the outer lounge, almost empty now, for the dancers had all gone home.

As she turned towards the door, she saw a programme on the floor: she read the word *Thaïs*; she bent and picked it up.

She paused for a moment and smiled indulgently at the inadequate programme note on the opera. She smiled again when she saw her own name in blacker and thicker letters than any other in the cast. Then she looked towards the sofa which was next to her and saw Simon Grantham, lying back, his eyes open, staring at her with a sort of calm terror in his expression.

'Is this yours? I'm sorry.'

She held it out to him.

'Yes.' He sat up and then stood up in front of her. He didn't seem wholly to belong to his clothes. He wore them with comfortable carelessness, his hair was not immaculate, his tie awry. But she saw nothing beyond his terrified eyes and the extraordinary beauty of his ears and his chin and his nose. His eyes seemed to her to be very old and sad; as if an aged man were staring at her through a young mask. 'But if you want it, take it.'

Then he put out his hand. 'No, don't take it. I want it. Do you mind? I want it.'

She handed the programme to him.

'You see,' he said excitedly, 'this is my first opera and well . . . I would like to keep it. But if you really want it. . . .'

They looked at each other for an unnaturally long time. For one moment, Judith thought she was extending her hand to touch his eyelashes.

'Your first opera! In all your life?'

'Yes, you see, I'm from abroad and we

don't have opera where I lived ; and in my vacs. I've always gone to the English country.'

Judith turned to walk away.

' Goodnight,' she said.

Then she came back. ' If you're from abroad, then you're not English. I am not English, so we may speak without—well—I want to know what you thought of it.'

' It was the most wonderful thing I ever heard. You see, I went with my father. He arrived in England to-day. I'd never even read *Thaïs*. I didn't know music could be like that.'

' Like what ? '

' Well, that a story could be made so great, that it could be so—so powerful.'

' Can't we sit down,' she said.

' Have you heard it ? Have you heard Thaïs, or seen her, Judith Silver.'

' Yes, I've heard her,' Judith answered.

' Don't you think she is wonderful ? I've never seen anybody as beautiful before.'

Judith smiled.

Simon was spilling his words carelessly, as if he were talking with his memory, not with the impressions and events of the minute. He stared at Judith until she had to look away.

' That scene, with her in the desert, I can never forget that.'

Then Judith whispered, softly, the theme of her song.

Simon muttered from a dry throat, ' You . . . you are Judith Silver. I see. I know. You are,'

Judith stood up.

He put out his hand and she touched it gently. 'But I must go. It has spoiled it, telling you, letting you know.'

'Oh, no, please, please, stay.'

She sat down again.

'But I can't say anything,' he told her. 'I have nothing to say to you.'

Then he grew within himself. 'But I have. I loved you to-night. I thought I felt your pain as you walked over the desert. Your tired, lovely feet. No, we must not talk like that. Not in this place. I hate it. And I must go. Oh, I must go.' His face was near her. He knelt upon one knee, above her. 'I loved you to-night. I know it is absurd. But it is not absurd. I loved you. I love you so that I am afraid to touch your hand to say "Goodnight".'

He stood up. He took the programme from the sofa and walked from the lounge, leaving Judith alone.

III

He had breakfast with his father, at a table from which they could see the river. James Grantham was excited and curious: every building, the bridges, the noise, the rich spaciousness of the dining-room, the memory of the opera: they were all proof of the fact that he was at last in England.

When Simon went back to his bedroom, he sent Judith a note.

He was very nervous of the increased momentum of his life. He could see Cleopatra's needle, piercing the silver river mists, and heavy barges floating solemnly down the Thames, and the embankment traffic and the stiff, unmoving trees.

'Dear Madame Silver,' he wrote.

'I want to apologize for being so foolish, but I also want to see you, if you will allow me. I am leaving for the country with my father after lunch. I suppose your morning is packed with things you want to do, but I am very anxious to see you. Perhaps you will tell the page your answer. I'll tell him to wait for it.

Yours sincerely,

Simon Grantham.'

The morning papers lay all over her room, on sofas and chairs, on the floor. She was successful. The telephone had been ringing and she had already seen her manager, who smacked his hands and behaved like a firework, dancing about the room saying '*Maraviglioso*, Madame Silver, *exquis*, miraculous.'

In the end she had said, 'Don't be silly. Go away and become cool. Study these English people with their stiff faces. Don't be so excited.'

'But you have done some miracles and you stand there like the wife of Lot.'

'Yes. I stand here like the wife of Lot, whoever she may be. And I only want to be alone and eat my breakfast. I am mostly

British, you know, Monsieur Martin, and even if it is Irish-British I don't feel inclined to explosions.'

'Ah, I am manager to a statue of ice.'

'Go away like a good manager and . . . well, first of all, ring that bell and then take a carnation out of that basket . . . no . . . not a pink one. You would take a pink one. Take a white one. And wear it all day, with my love, and don't prance. Walk. You are in England. The land of restraint.'

'But I can't restrain. Oh!'

He had bowed, closed the door and left Judith alone.

It was then that the page came with Simon's note.

She wrote her answer. 'You may come but not to apologize. Come to my sitting-room which is number 563. But if you apologize, I'll push you through these windows into the river!'

Ten minutes afterwards, Simon was with her.

He seemed to be bigger than he was the night before. He wore a grey suit. His tie was a sort of dark blue, jumbled, small pattern. She was self-conscious; a rare experience, which made her walk to the window and talk about the 'view.'

'I hate scenery,' answered Simon.

'So do I. Let us have coffee.'

'I've had breakfast, but I'd like it.'

'Well, sit down and tell me about the

country and about your father and why you are going away and everything.'

'Oh, there is nothing to tell. My father arrived from New Zealand yesterday and I am at Cambridge. So he is coming to live in a house near me.'

'New Zealand! But that is on the bottom of the world. That little red bit. Did he come all that distance?'

'Yes. I was born there, too.'

'Ah, that explains something to me.'

'Explains what?'

'Oh, never mind. Most coffee or most milk? Which?'

'Half-and-half.'

'What is half-and-half? I do not know that!'

'Half of coffee and half of milk.'

'Oh!'

Then Simon smiled and said, 'But what did you mean when you said something, about New Zealand. Do I look like it?'

'No, no! But you are not like all these other people who are so meek and subdued and *sans couleur*. You have some vitality . . . it is the difference, oh, I don't know. You come to see me and I am a famous person overnight and you don't say, "Madame Silver, you are a great prima donna." These papers! Look!' She scooped one up and sent the sheets flying over the carpet. 'They all say I am wonderful. I cannot feel very pleased about it. I don't know why. I think it is very bad,

very unintelligent to be satisfied or pleased with one's performance.'

'Oh, but I was there, and well—I cannot forget what I said to you last night, in the lounge. That was all I could say.'

'Ah! Don't say it again! Not now, Mr. Grantham. But yes, *do* say it again. I have been foolish, too. I am afraid of you. And don't say "lounge." It is such an ugly word. And you are only a boy—no—don't look like that. I don't mean to be grown up. My father would have liked you, oh yes, I know he would have liked you.'

Then Judith told him about her father and not until the very end of her story did he remember his own father, waiting in the room upstairs, and packing.

'And your father is alive and with you. Oh, Mr. Grantham, that is wonderful. Tell me about him! Why you have been apart so long.'

'He has been ill for many years, Madame Silver. He has been mentally ill. He is not yet completely well. Of course, he is quite all right—you know what I mean. But he is a nervous child over most things.' He told her then, of the quiet little cottage in Essex, of Cambridge, of his careless life in Jesus Lane, of the river, his friends, of New Zealand, the hills, the rivers and the sun. He told her of the black storm, and his father and the sun-baked bungalow above the river, where James Grantham lived during the years they were apart.

Judith was very still when his last word was spoken.

She was near enough to him to put out her hand and touch his sleeve. 'You are coming to see me very often in London, little boy'—he knitted his eyebrows in protest. 'Oh, no, not a little boy like that. I won't say it again. But we . . . well, I do not know, but I don't mind what you said to me last night. I don't know why I don't mind. I am not conscious of any feeling about it, except that I am pleased. But I am talking a jumble. I am nervous of you. I have never been nervous of people. I live on courage. And now I seem as if I am going to die because of the lack of it.'

Simon put his hand across on to his own arm. He moved it then, over Judith's fingers. 'You are so wonderful, you just belong to some world I cannot touch. I know I am in love with you. It is hopeless, I know. But I am. I am.'

'Well, whether it is true, you or I cannot tell. You don't know. I don't know. There is no intelligent explanation of it, is there? I suppose love is a mystery, like a sacrament. And the destroyers are those who try to explain it. I am willing to accept it as a mystery and not ask why. But, I can think of no arguments but old ones. I am already too fond of you to say anything I have not realised, clearly, within myself. You must go back to your father now. When do you come to London?'

'On Thursday. You see, I am not finishing

my third year. It is all stupid, but I cannot do both : look after my father and work for my degree. So I am going to be with him all I can. So I am free, more or less. Would you let me see you if I came on Thursday. But that is the night you do Tosca . . . it matters, doesn't it ? '

' Oh, I shut myself up all day. It isn't temperament or anything like that. I must be sensible. You come. I'll send you a stall. Come to me afterwards and we'll return here and have supper. There'll be other people. I cannot avoid that. I am sorry. But they will be pleasant people, and interesting, I hope.'

' And won't I see you alone ? '

' Yes, we'll send them all away, early. Besides, there is next day. We'll have a very late breakfast together, like this.'

Simon went then. But he smiled and glowed and lifted Judith's hand to his lips, and when he was running along the passage, he kicked a pair of shoes, so that they scuttled along the floor, and finished twenty feet from the door to which they belonged.

His father was sitting at the window when he opened the bedroom door.

' Where have you been ? I've read the leader in *The Times* and an advertisement on how to keep thin and I don't know what.'

' Oh, messing about,' was Simon's answer.

' You're very red, Simon, you've been hurrying.'

'Yes, I did hurry.'

They went out then, to buy shirts and a pair of braces.

'But we mustn't buy them in the Strand, James.'

'Why?'

'Goodness gracious! Nobody ever shops in the Strand.'

So they crossed the grey space of Trafalgar Square in a jumping taxicab.

## IV

They left London in the afternoon, and all the time they were in the train, Simon answered his father's eager questions.

'Simon, did you say eight or nine rooms? I hope the water's hot in the morning. Is this housekeeper—what's her name, Mrs. Iron—what is she like?'

'She's a most cheerful person. You'll like her. You needn't be afraid of that. Motherly, you know.'

After lunch, they arrived at the little village seventeen miles from Cambridge. Stansted, Quendon, Rickling Green, and Saffron Walden were its neighbours, but it was set aside, like some spinster sitting back against a wall, afraid to venture into the dance. Its four twisted streets ran out from its centre, where the thatched houses looked on to a pond, in which excited ducks and boisterous puppies gave a false sense of animation to the community. The cottages had been built in

groups, like broad old people sitting shoulder to shoulder, comfortably, on sofas. For three hundred years they had sat beside the street, their thatch almost black and rather ragged, with green moss in the dampest parts and the gayest of geraniums in the windows below.

They found the house, and Mrs. Iron oiling the hinges of the gate. 'Good morning, sir. I knew you wouldn't like the squeak, sir. There's a fire, sir, although it's a warmish day.'

The house overlooked the pond, where the yelping puppies still played their unending game with the frightened ducks and geese. A little girl was bowling a hoop down the hill, and her long legs made black X's as she ran. The cottages seemed to be waiting. They were like scenery from which the players had departed. But there was a woman, old and sagging, sitting on a straight-backed chair in the street, outside her house. She wore a galatea apron and in her lap were three fluffy, golden chickens, eating oatmeal out of her hand. And there was an old man, bent and slow, who walked hesitatingly, like a mechanical toy with the spring almost run down.

James Grantham turned and looked at the houses of his neighbours. Here was the quiet of Karangahake, but an older quiet, a stillness born of time and resignation. The house Simon had found for him was made from three cottages, the centre one cleared to make a big room, half timbered, with great beams and

erratic windows, one slanting so much that he would be able to see the moon through it at night. The ends of the house were two storied, each with a narrow staircase, small bedrooms upstairs and underneath, kitchen and bathroom at one end and at the other a big bedroom, and a sitting-room. Simon and his father stood in the central room.

'Well, this is fine,' said James. He opened a cupboard. He took up an old snowstorm. He turned it round and then placed it on the table again, watching the flakes falling round the painted lighthouse inside. Mrs. Iron came forward.

'Don't put it in the sun, sir. They snowstorms is ticklish sensitive things. They flakes is made from the scrapings of candles, and my sister what lived in Audley End left her snowstorm in the sun, sir, and the flakes melted with the 'eat and were just a mess in the bottom of it.'

'Certainly, Mrs. Iron. We must keep it in a cool place.'

'They snowstorms is no good in tropical parts where you come from, sir.'

'Well, they're hardly tropical, Mrs. Iron, but they are certainly warmer than England.'

'Iron's taken your boxes to your rooms, sir, and will Mr. Simon be wanting a tarpaulean for his car, in case of a shower, sir? Weather's weather, and as my sister at Audley End says, sir, you've got to weather weather, whether or not. Foolish, isn't it, sir, but you never know in these parts.'

'No, it doesn't matter, but we'd like a cup of tea.'

So they had their first tea in James Grantham's new house; and while Mrs. Iron was describing the patent toasting fork as 'newfangling,' they walked about the house and saw the rooms. Simon was to have a room to which he could come whenever he liked. It was to be over the bathroom, because the bedrooms above his father's room were small. The walls of James Grantham's bedroom were covered with cream paper, with little bouquets of yellow roses and maidenhair fern, prim and stiff, but pleasantly faded. The white curtains had a pattern of trellis work and hollyhocks and the bed was wide and heavy. From this, a door led to a small sitting-room, in which there was a grandfather clock, so tall that even when the squiggly knobs had been taken from its forehead, there was only half an inch for breathing space between itself and the ceiling. There was a gate-leg table and a bookcase, with bound volumes of the *Sunday At Home*, two or three of Crockett's novels, a set of Condor's travels and some novels of Ralph Connor. There was a china model of the Kew Pagoda on the mantelpiece, a framed painting of the Houses of Parliament at night, with tinselled windows, and a stuffed hen pheasant with one glass eye loose so that it squinted. There were two or three comfortable chairs and an open fireplace, too big for the room, almost filling one wall. But still it was the big, lofty, central

room of the house in which somebody had been thoughtful and affectionate in choosing colours and furniture. There was a long refectory table, three high-backed needlework chairs, sofas, a glass cabinet filled with pretty things, two bookcases, a writing desk and, in and above the enormous old brick fireplace, shining copper pans and bed-warmers and some Roman tiles. There was a big Spanish stamped leather screen and a heavy chair in front of it, near the fire.

'That's to be your chair always. I decided when I saw the house first,' said Simon. 'And you must have a table beside it and Mrs. Iron must never touch the table.' She came in at that moment. 'Mrs. Iron,' said Simon, 'my father is to have a small table next to his chair. That's his chair, and he can be as untidy with it as he likes. Pipes and papers and matches, and you're never to touch it.'

'Oh, I know gentlemen, sir, I've done for them before. But I always gets a whisk of the feather duster in when no one's looking. But I'll bring the table in as you says, sir. Will you be wanting the fire built up, sir, or is it warm as it is?'

'I'll throw a log on,' said Simon.

They sat near the fire, and between them, Mrs. Iron put a table on which she spread a cloth with crocheted pansies around its hem. There was toast under a shining white cover, toast and anchovies, brown bread and butter on a blue plate, and a home-made fruit cake

with a crack on its summit. The cups and saucers were big and white, with gold rims.

'Of course, this is marvellous, Simon.'

'I'm glad it's something like what you wanted, because I've never done anything like this before. I was afraid of leaking roofs and bad drains so I insisted on a clause in the agreement to protect us.'

'Well, I think it's everything it should be. I could almost bear it if Tower himself walked in with a Latin grammar in his hand.'

'Oh, why did you have that man to look after me,' said Simon. 'I was so afraid of him and yet so contemptuous that I don't believe he ever taught me anything. And those dreadful quotations. I went to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in Cambridge about two years ago and every now and then one of Tower's awful quotations would come in. It completely spoiled the play for me.'

'Yes, he was odd. Do you read much?'

'No, not very much. The people I've been staying with in Scotland were what they called literary. But I want to read *Thaïs* after last night. I'll tackle it in French; it will be good for me.'

Simon had not told his father about Judith.

'I didn't tell you. I forgot in the rush. But I met the prima donna in the hotel.'

'Met her, how?'

'Well, after I said goodnight to you, I went down to the lounge again and I must have fallen asleep on the sofa. She came in and—'

Simon told him about the programme. But he said no more.

Simon stayed with his father for two days. The years that had intervened between their life in Karangahake and the discoveries in this place of their adoption, were unreal to both of them. Their conversation leapt the gap so naturally that they came to look on all that had happened as a story in which they had been hardly more than spectators. But at night when James was alone, he thought of the house and the verandah and the doctor and the river and the rattling milk cans on the landing and the loneliness of his life there. But this only vaguely, for his present happiness forced disturbing memories into a cellar of forgetfulness.

Their conversation played around the memories they had shared, Tower and his quotations—

'Do you remember when he bought those dreadful pepper and salt plus fours and when we laughed he said, "Ah, laugh and the world laughs with you," and you said, "Yes, Tower, but wear those plus fours and you'll always sleep alone," and he answered, "Ah, you misquote the poet, Mr. Grantham." '

They laughed and then remembered Mrs. Tucker, her buried romance of the Stormy Petrel, her pink flannel underclothes which she hung to dry in a secluded corner of the orchard because she thought it immodest that the Maori boy should see them.

They talked, too, of the excitement of the new house, the village, the rumours of the local store, and the gossip of Mrs. Iron. They moved tables and pictures, arranged books on shelves and walked along all the four roads that lead from the village to the open country, winding unreasonably, past cottages distempered white or pink, with children and fowls and swinging gates and windows in which the lace curtains had waists, tied with blue or pink bows.

When Simon went away to London, and James Grantham was alone, he walked great distances and he read many books. He painted a garden seat and, when it was dry, he sat on it in the morning, arranging his pipe and his newspaper and his book, resting his 'feet on this 'ere mat in case the damp strikes cold up through to your stomach,' because Mrs. Iron was insistent. He would spin theories about his life. From the tangle of threads he made a pattern ; a pattern of self-discipline for his thoughts and actions. He would restrain his love for Simon and not frighten the boy with the geysers of emotion with which he had disturbed their life in Karangahake. He'd make the house into a quiet, calm place and himself into a cheerful person, so that Simon should always want to come there.

He observed the life of the villagers. He gave the village club two pounds to pay for the cleaning of the war memorial, an ugly obelisk with stone steps on which the school children

sharpened their slate pencils. He went to a whist drive, presented the prizes and even yielded to the energetic figures of a barn dance with the school teacher.

'And tell me, Mr. Grantham, who conducts your cuisine?' she had said.

He wrote it all on a postcard before he went to bed, walking half a mile to post it to Simon.

*To-night. Went to a whist drive. Most exciting. Danced with the school teacher and she asked me who conducts my 'cuisine.' A good word, eh! Love, J. Come back soon.*

Simon would be able to see from that that he was not allowing himself to be old and dull. It sounded 'young,' written like that. Other fathers wouldn't think of it.

They'd be wonderful friends some day and when he was old, Simon would be middle-aged and they'd have the same tastes and wishes and interests. Life was to be great fun now, if he only managed himself as he should.

## CHAPTER IV

### I

Love did not come to Judith suddenly—like the stab of a knife in a silken gown. It stole upon her slowly—as the glow of a fire moves in waves of comfortable warmth through a cold body. Her mind found new ecstasies in thought —beautiful things were intensified until they hurt her—her fingers moved over the tortured figure on her crucifix until the agony of the Crucifixion seemed to sweep through her own body and draw her into new intimacies with God. He came so near her that her faith was like a chariot of thunder in which she moved, divinely protected from pain or doubt. Through her slowly growing love, the figure of her tender father moved, like a theme of faint and lovely notes. As her love increased, her body trembled with an exquisite hunger for Simon, Simon who was young : his lashes on his cheeks, his mouth like a rich flame. She wanted him, his arms to hold her, so that she could not protest or move. Yet she never thought of him as a living thing of the earth. Her desire was not the closing of a spiritual door. Through his body she saw the way open to a clearer, wider conception of God. Her

father had told her that the great hand of God would touch them.

She remembered little incidents of her life, rain on the awnings in Paris and the sun breaking in suddenly, the clocks in her room—she hoped they were going—'Never let the clocks run down, Judie,' her father had said. 'They are like dead people when they stop.' Scenery disappearing into the shadowy heights of the opera house—the pencil at the end of the piano, when she was tall enough to press down a note with two little fingers. The pencil with which her mother used to beat time for the pupils; her own lessons, and the day when the concierge's wife died, when the piano was locked and Judith had played on the closed lid, singing a song.

'Judie, Judie, stop—the dead—stop singing,' her mother had said.

'No, let her sing if she wants to,' her father had answered. 'The dead are dead—Judie is alive—let her sing—why shouldn't she sing?' The woman died in the morning and Judie was confused because she thought people always died at night.

For three days they were together when Simon came back to London. Simon, a little selfish—saying, with his love, 'I want this of my love,' 'I want that of my love,' Judith giving her mind and her heart in a saintly selflessness that made her say, 'He is my lord—my master—I give whatever of myself he needs to make himself complete.' A new glory came

to her singing. She played *Thaïs* again and when she came to the closing scenes of the play, her love made her voice like a refreshing torrent. Her body was like a rope, tying the life of the earth to the Heavens towards which she lifted her arms. She felt the stream of her love of Simon passing through her, from Simon to herself, herself to God. Her performance astounded everybody in the theatre and when she left the stage, nobody spoke to her. Some of them were afraid, silent, as if there was some awful, inevitable revelation in her singing, in her *Thaïs*, passing from the libertine's house in Alexandria to the folds of God's robe.

One day they went to Kew and ate boiled eggs and cress and brown bread, and Simon hunted over the stretches of lawn to find enough daisies to make a chain for her. They walked through the orchid house, breathless with pleasure at the colours—masses of yellow and brown and mauve. After their lunch, when the sun was high, they sat on the grass.

Out of a silence, during which she dug a little gold pencil into the cracks in the earth . . . each time deeper as if her decision was strengthening, she said, ' Simon, I know you are a Catholic, but we have never talked about it.'

He did not answer.

' It is so important to me, dear, that I must talk. I must know what you feel. I know in a way. You could not be as you are if you were not brought up to believe in the same way as I do.'

'Well, Judie, I am afraid about it. I knew you'd ask me and I've been rather a coward. I have not been to Mass or Confession for more than a year. You see, father never worried very much and there was no church in Karangahake. We were sort of isolated. Then when I went to Cambridge, everything seemed so difficult. I am not making excuses. If you want me to go to Mass and all that, I'll do it, dear. I only want to please you.'

'But it is not a matter of pleasing me. It is a question of your own feelings. If you loved me as I love you, you'd *have* to pray about it.'

'I do, in a way. Oh, I know what you mean. But I never seem to be able to find anything solid. Cambridge has weaned me away from it, I suppose. You know, young fellows now-a-days talk more about religion than anything else. But they seem to want to find out for themselves.'

'But there's nothing to find out, Simon. If you are a Catholic, you accept God as a mystery. You don't try to explain Him as if He were a scientific problem. You cannot explain a spiritual power with intellectual theories.'

'Oh, I do know, Judie. I know what you mean and I do feel it. And you can help me. I have thought of it a great deal . . . what you said about the Trinity, ourselves and God. I feel it, too. I feel that I want to talk it all over with a third person, but not a human being.'

'Then do share it with Him. All the discontent between married people is because they think they are clever enough to make happiness themselves; they think it can be manufactured out of social comfort and financial security. They think it begins and ends with their own mutual attraction. To me it is a sin for people to marry and have children without knowing for certain that those children are to be born within a kind of halo of Divine Grace; the Grace that comes to them because their love is sanctified with God; by His approval of their being together. I have seen it all so often in the theatre. People think too much and believe too little. I am not going to force you, dear. I don't want to set up standards to terrify you. But I shall pray about it, Simon, my love.'

She looked at him and he looked at her. The moment she saw the unmoving calm in his eyes, she knew that her prayer was answered; that something stronger than themselves was drawing them within a holy consciousness in which their own powers were negative; in which their own strength could relax because a bond would hold them away from the outer currents of distrust and misunderstanding.

She took his hands in hers and played with his wrists. She traced patterns over the backs of his hands with her finger and then Simon moved into a calm he had not known in all his life. He relaxed himself and found a security new and strange to him. 'I know, dear Judie.

I know. You have helped me. Quick, let us walk. I want to move, I am so happy. All the time up to now, I have been afraid. I thought of all the things that end. Death and all that. But it wouldn't matter now. All the cynical things people say about being in love. Oh, God bless you, my angel. . . . Come, let us walk over to those trees. . . . I cannot stay still. I cannot. . . .'

Simon became an insistent lover, repeating his phrases, 'Judith, I love you,' 'Judith, I love you,' in absurd places : in the lounges of hotels, in taxis, in lifts, 'Judith, lovely Judith.' From the boy there grew a bigger man, like a male tree growing out of a sexless sapling. He was taller, he could surround her. He lifted her, he carried her about the room, he was clumsy with nervousness, folding and unfolding his hands, moving them shyly towards her, one minute thinking of her as something delicate and then as something to hurt and press and overpower with the waves of his love —beating her down until she was silent, passive, submitting to him. He thought of her arms, so weak that he could move them beneath him, her eyes, closed, her body spent and tired and vanquished, himself, after the hot noon of his passion, moving to the quiet evening of sleep beside her, their hands upon each other. They went to places together, to the country.

'See, Simon—the blue and the yellow in those dead trees. When you look long enough they have brilliant colours.'

'Judith, I love that, the way your ear makes a shadow, see, move, yes, like that. I want to kiss the shadow.'

His hands were never still. They wanted her.

'See the fire, Simon—Somebody has said antlers of flame. You can see them. Oh, everything is different now, my darling—I cannot be tired, there is no silence, there are new sounds in the air. The air is full of sounds, little sounds. Still!' She put her hand on his.—'Still, listen, the sounds. And every shadow, dear, and every line. Everything is so lovely now. My little boy. You are my child, my child, Simon. You see, it is against my heart I hold you. I talk with God when I hold you. We are never alone. While I hold you, see, like this, your head. I can feel my heart thumping against you, but I lift my head. I am praying, my Simon, I am praying. Oh, God, keep him next to me forever, oh, God, do this and I won't forget my humility—I'll never let my love for him become more than my love for You, my duty. Oh, God, keep him like this. I am his mother, see, I put my hands around his eyes. I know so much he doesn't know. He is so little—God, my Father, God, my strength—make me good and lovely and make my love a thing of *giving*. Don't let them hurt my love, dear God. Let my Father bless our love.'

Her hands rested on Simon's head. He was asleep, next to her. Her tears made little

smudges on her hands when she put them against her cheek. For an hour she sat, afraid to move and awaken him, her little finger tracing circles and crosses in the soft hair on the nape of his neck.

Then he awoke and, in a half-sleep, he turned and lifted his arms, around her, drawing her down on the sofa beside him. He slept again—and Judith dreamed of a deep scented wood and Simon and herself walking there, a hot wind on her face.—The hot wind of her dream was Simon's breath on her closed eyes.

II

When the opera season was over, Judith went to Paris. On the night before she left London, Simon came down from Cambridge, and together they explored new places. They had never been to the Café Royal, so they went there for cocktails. 'I've heard of a place where we can get Chinese food. I don't know what it is like. Shall we risk it?' said Simon. So, rather like children playing truant, they walked up the curve of Regent Street and turned into the crowded, noisy stream of Oxford Street.

They found the place, an orgy of gold spirals and scarlet, embroidered panels, Chinese waiters and an immense glass case of dolls, mandarins, houses and Chinese girls, flowers and trees, jumbled together, above the fan-

tastic people who sat in alcoves, outlined in fringes of green and gold and yellow.

'I hope the food is as good as the colour,' said Simon. There were oranges on a blue plate and claret in long thin glasses, steaming Chinese food in octagonal green dishes and, in the centre of the room, about twenty people dancing—little Jews in light brown suits, Chinese undergraduates with hair like polished ebony, perfectly cut clothes, and fine yellow hands: painted, pretty little sluts, in 'gun-metal grey' stockings, who wore big paste buckles in their hats and little wisps of stiff, curled hair, dragged out over their ears. Their silk dresses clung to the curves of their hips and breasts.

'Do you mind it, Judie? I didn't know it was like this.'

'No, of course not. When I did small tours, we had girls like that in the chorus sometimes. Absolute darlings, some of them, in their sad way. Simon, look at your plate, that wretched little minx is making eyes at you.'

'Where?'

'There!'

'Horrible!'

'It isn't so horrible, really. I am always lecturing you. But you must not be such a prig. Of course, I think and know it's awful—but turning that rather pleasant nose of yours up in the air is not going to send all these pathetic things back to a life of virtue. Within

the limitations of their standards, they are rather good people. They have all sorts of ethics about helping each other—I knew a girl of this sort in Paris. Poor silly child, she tried to woo father away. Oh, Simon, if you could only imagine what a funny thing that was. Daddy, of all people. I made him tell me. Then we hunted her out and made her come to tea. She wasn't French at all—came from Algiers and had a baby there—she was trying to make enough money to go home. We gave it to her and she went.'

'And your father didn't mind you meeting her?'

'No, of course not. Surely you see that!'

'Oh yes, I do. But you are so frank and wonderful about it.'

He thought of Delphine then—'Have I ever told you about my one romance, Judie?'

'You mean about myself?'

'No, don't fool. I was in love last year. At least I thought I was. Oh, it is funny to think of it now! I wish you could have met them.'

'Them—what them?'

Simon told her about Delphine.

'Now, I have no secrets from you, Judie.'

'But how dull.'

'Where do you go from Paris?'

'Rome and Vienna. I have two weeks between, with nothing to do, so I think I'll go to Naples and perhaps to Sicily. Then Paris, and then for one week in November, my silly

Martin comes here to arrange a concert for me. I think I'll come too. You'll be at Cambridge then. I could come down and you could come to London. You know, we are very foolish' (the violinist in the double-breasted dinner jacket was playing the 'Ave Maria' from *Cavalleria Rusticana*) 'because we never talk of the future.'

'When I come down, Judie, I'm going to be a great business magnate and make a fortune. It is all planned. You know that when I do come down, I have my own thousand a year. That was arranged when father fell ill—eight years ago.'

'Oh—well—the solution, if we do marry—'

'If we do—what do you mean? Judith, are you tiring of me already?'

'Don't be foolish. *Now, Judie, let us make our descent on to some brass tacks.* Father used to say that to me—of course, your father is the main consideration.'

'Oh, don't I know it. I lie awake wrestling with it all the time.'

'Well, it is all very plain and simple. I have to meet him and make him like me. That will be hard work at first. But we'll do it, Simon, Judith and Company, won't we?'

'Yes, you amazing person.'

'Then, if he behaves like a reasonable human being, which must be arranged with kindness, you'll become my manager.'

'But, Judie—'

'Yes, I know, a very bad one you'll

be, I know. But it is inevitable. Here we are, eating this strange food, storing up a lifetime of indigestion, and in love with each other, so we've got to make the best of it.'

'Do you think I could do it?'

'I don't know, but we'll try. Of course you could, dear old funny face, of course. Then we'll put our sous into one box and buy a house in the South of France and live happily ever after.'

She thought of James Grantham again, but the joy in Simon's smile was so complete that she did not say so.

III

Early in November, James Grantham went to Cambridge and stayed with Simon. Sometimes they talked about Judith, but his father's tentative questions made Simon self-conscious and reticent. One day they lunched in hall and as they walked out down the Chimney they met Ralph Alveston. All three went to the inn to tea, and while Simon talked to Ralph, of Scotland and Delphine and September, he saw that his father was anxious and suspicious.

'Mother and Delphine have gone to Madeira,' said Ralph.

'How is she—Delphine?' asked Simon.

'Oh, as healthy and silly as ever. She's always asking about you.'

'Well, give her my love when you write.'

Ralph turned to Mr. Grantham and said, 'You know, it's a good job you've come to England to keep an eye on him. He almost fell in love with my perfectly stupid sister, and my perfectly stupid sister fell completely in love with him.'

'Oh!—Simon, you never told me about it.'

Mr. Grantham's face moved into an unconvincing smile. Simon knew that he was making a mountain of fantasy out of a molehill of fact. Why was Ralph Alveston such a fool? Why did he chatter like this? It would take such a lot of explaining, afterwards!

When Ralph left them, they walked out on the Fens, broad and still and green, the river muddy and cold. Then back into the town. Simon tried to show his father the interesting places, the old court of Corpus, King's, and the bridges over the river. He found himself making efforts, like a professional guide, because he knew that ever since he told his father about Judith, there had been a gap between them. And now even this stupid reference to Delphine had aggravated him.

They were walking back towards Jesus Lane and had just turned the corner. They had been too busy crossing the streets, avoiding bicycles and turning corners to talk, and every now and then, Simon would look at his father and see in his face the same tired, frightened expression he remembered in Karangahake.

In those days he had not known what it meant.

'Tell me about Alveston. Tell me about his sister, Delphine. What is she like?'

'But I did tell you, daddy. She's a perfectly silly but pretty little girl I met in Scotland last year. Ralph always chaffs me about her.'

'Were you very fond of her?'

'I thought I was. But it was just silly.'

'You like Judith Silver better?'

'Yes!'

The 'yes' slipped out with a metallic click. It sounded more angry than Simon intended.

'I suppose I can't hope to interest you for ever. You see, my boy, it's a terrible thing to love anybody as much as I love you, because I am always jealous. I am very candid about it. You can't blame me, can you?'

'No, daddy. But I don't think you should tell me quite so often. Sometimes it is selfish to tell people you love them. No! No! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to say that—it isn't what I thought!'

'Selfish! Selfish!'

'I'm terribly sorry. I didn't mean that. I didn't!'

They came to Midsummer Common and crossed the road. Ralph Alveston and two men in plus fours were lighting cigarettes near the gate. So the conversation ended. They were not alone again. Ralph followed Simon into the sitting-room, and at seven o'clock, James Grantham left for Essex, by train.

He did manage to say, ' I'm sorry, daddy. I didn't want to be difficult,' as he was lifting his father's bag into the rack. But when the train was gone and he was walking back into the town, he was glad of Ralph Alveston and glad of the release. He wanted to love his father, but this nervous suspicion, this insistent love of which his father spoke, seemed to beat him down and leave him weak and dry. He was sorry he had spoken—that he had said ' Sometimes it is selfish to tell people that you love them.' But now he completed the thought in his mind—that you should be careful in telling other people that you love them. It was selfish because it placed them under an obligation. It obliged them to express their feelings in response, and sometimes, kindness would make them assume a duty, would make them unconsciously fake an affection they did not feel. All the time his father was in Cambridge, he had tried to surround him with warmth and attention. The theatre, his friends to tea, lunch in hall, hot toddy before his father went to bed, the box of cigarettes in his bedroom, and the hot water bottle—but his eagerness was assumed and he always had his eye on the clock, waiting for the moment when he would be released from the awful strain of making a duty appear to be a pleasure.

But no duty or laws of conduct could demand that he should give up Judith.

Next day he wrote his father a letter. He

posted it in the morning. Later in the day he thought perhaps he should motor over to see him. So he asked for an exeat and left Cambridge after dinner. But his letter arrived before him.

IV

James Grantham liked the quiet order of the house. After dinner, Muriel used to put an oil stove in his bedroom—' To warm the air, sir, no more. If you kept it going all night, you might as well sleep in a lethal chamber.'

Muriel had heard Mrs. Iron say this. She didn't know what a lethal chamber could be. ' But you mark my words, it's something awful,' she told her brother, ' because Mrs. Iron is one to say awful things.'

At ten o'clock she brought a tray, a decanter of whisky and a syphon and glasses. The dining-room clock always struck just as she opened the door—he suspected her of waiting, her hand on the knob, for the first stroke of ten. At half-past-ten he would stretch his arms wide, yawn, pat his open mouth with the back of his hand, scatter the embers of the fire, turn down the lamp, so that the flame spurted before it died, and go to his bedroom. The top of the oil stove made a pattern of light and shade on the ceiling, an intricate lace work, a gigantic filigree, with stars and diamonds and discs and crescents. But he lit the candles and the pattern

disappeared. When this happened, he would obey Mrs. Iron who said, ' And don't forget to turn it out, sir, just one or two twists and put it outside the door, because the fumes might be a lethal chamber, and make us die in our beds.' His bed was against the wall, and its cover was like the curtains, covered with stiff, full-faced flowers.

But this night, he did not wait until half-past-ten. He opened Simon's letter when it came.

' My Dear Daddy,

I am sorry if I upset you yesterday afternoon before you left, but it is just a little hard for me to understand you sometimes. Nothing has happened since you left. I have been to two lectures and to bed, so there is no news. But I wanted to send you this little note to say how sorry I am for what I said on the way home. I loved having you here.

But I feel I must be honest and straightforward about Judith. If everything goes on as I want it to, I am to marry Judith. We are informally engaged. I don't want to do anything to distress you or make you feel that I am failing in my duty to you. You must not feel that this will make any difference. You will love Judith. She is a very good Catholic, much more so than I can ever hope to be. Already, I feel mentally and spiritually that I am a different being and I know that this fact alone will make you pleased about it all. She returns to England to-morrow, and is to stay in London for one week. I hope in a day or two to be able to write to you and

suggest that we both go to London to meet her. Please don't think that Judith can possibly make any difference to my love for you. Indeed, I think she will help us to understand each other much better, because she has those qualities which are beyond human comprehension, and which seem to draw people together more than all the talking and reasoning in the world. I will write to you, or motor over as soon as I can.

Your affectionate son,

SIMON.'

When James read the letter, he found himself hating Judith so much that he invented fantastic ways of destroying her. He imagined a conglomeration of wrecked trains, crashing vehicles, death and physical disfigurement. He banged the table, melodramatically, and said, 'No ! No ! '

He didn't finish his dinner. He asked Muriel to bring him the decanter and he sat down and poured out whisky upon whisky. Simon married ! How he'd hate her ! How he *did* hate her—now ! What was the use of trying ? Simon didn't love him one whit, or he couldn't do this. Oh yes, it was all very well to talk about people killing the thing they loved by enveloping it too completely. He knew all about that. Parents loving so much that their love was a cloud over their children. Parents who loved, saying that they wanted to suppress their children and hide them and keep them. He had made that

mistake. He went to bed, and because he was half-drunk he went to sleep.

Mrs. Iron came in at half-past nine and took the stove out of his room.

## V

He dreamed that he was walking up a hot, dusty hill. There was a road cut into the yellow clay, but the jungle came down to the very edge and in the tangle of trees and vines, where it was dark, thousands of monkeys were chattering. They came to the edge to see him and their eyes blinked and their tails swung among the branches. There were parakeets and orchids—the air was full of screeching and heat. He could see the boat where he had left it down at the landing. There were so many little frogs baking on the road, that when they hopped back into the bush, frightened at his approach, they made a loud swishing noise among the leaves. Some of the monkeys swung themselves down from branch to branch, breaking green and purple orchids off their stems as they brushed against them, and coming right out on to the stark baked clay to peer at him. There was a long climb before he came to the house, and as he turned up over the hill, still between the great walls of the jungle, cobras swung their heads lazily in the air, and a python lay across the road like a vast pipe. Near the house, there were great compounds, in which the wild animals were kept before they

were shipped away to the zoos in Europe. He could see the lions passing up and down behind the bamboo which was lashed together with thongs. There were giraffes, their fantastic necks standing against the gold-blue sky and massive grey elephants and leopards sleeping in the sun. He stepped on to the verandah and walked into the room.

There were eight Portuguese keepers sitting at the table, eating venison and bread fruit and drinking whisky. He was afraid of them. They were dark and humourless and evil : some of them had angry sores on their hands and their lips were like raw meat. When they looked up and saw him, pale and English, they laughed and one tore a piece of gristle from the meat in front of him and threw it at him. The bungalow was made of bamboo and tin and, from an inner room, there came two black servants with strings of sharks' teeth around their necks, their arms covered with bangles, from the wrists to the elbows. The eight Portuguese laughed at him. Then came an old woman, black as ebony. Her body was covered with long grey hair, so long that even her hands and feet were hidden, and in among the hair hung countless tiny monkey skulls. James was so afraid of her that he ran towards the door. But two of the Portuguese followed him and dragged him back, and when they observed his fear of the old woman, they pushed him towards her and tied him to her, so that her arms were round him and her

breath was on his face. He could see her teeth stained with betel nut. Outside he could hear the lions roaring and the elephants screaming in the heat. At all the windows the negroes watched him, and while the Portuguese tied him to the woman, so that his head was buried in the hair on her body, he heard them jump up from the table and dance around him, and he could feel the heat and the hair stifling him until he fainted.

He heard Simon calling him and then he felt the cords being cut so that he fell away from the terrible woman. He could see Simon stabbing the Portuguese with a knife and keeping them away, and then he felt himself picked up in Simon's arms and carried out, out, across the verandah and down the hill. The monkeys still chattered beside the road and the parakeets still screeched in the trees. The Portuguese yelled as they followed him. Simon carried him up the bank and in among the trees, this way and that way, to evade them. At last they came to a clearing, and round the clearing there moved a company of lions and monkeys, so many that they made a pattern, a merry-go-round of life and colour moving among the trees. Simon put him on the ground and then he brought him cocoanut milk and fruit. They stayed there for two days, Simon stroking his hair and saying, 'Don't worry—it's all right—they can't find us.' But the smell of the awful woman was still in his nostrils, and

when he put his hands out he could feel her dusty grey hair among his fingers. And still the monkeys and the lions revolved around them, setting up a guard, and over them the trees met, so that he could barely see the vines and the orchids and the little green snakes and the huge yellow butterflies that fluttered among the leaves. Overhead there was the sound of thumping, like a muffled drum. He put out his hands and found Simon in the shadows. Then he woke up and he still extended his hands and felt up and climbed out of bed into the dark spaces of the room to find Simon, and he whispered, 'Simon, Simon,' because he was afraid. The thumping grew louder. But Simon was not there.

As the dream vanished and the smell of the hairy woman left his nostrils, he could still hear the thumping overhead, and then he knew that it was the servant moving in her room, preparing to go to bed.

Suppression—that's what he'd done all the time—suppressed himself. Expansion! Simon didn't love him. He wasn't there, when he stretched out his hands, clutching finger by finger in the dark. He fumbled for the door and, out in the hall, he fumbled for the stairs. He could still hear Muriel moving in her room. He climbed the stairs and he knocked, quietly, on her door.

VI

As Simon drove down the hill, turning past the hawthorn hedge, he saw that there was a light in Muriel's bedroom. Yet all the rest of the house was dark ! not even the red lamp in the hall helped him to find the way up the path, after he had run the car in, under the shelter of the trees.

He opened the door and found his way to the lamp. Then he opened the door of his father's bedroom. ' Daddy,' he called, but there was no answer. He found a candle and, lighting it, walked to the bed. The clothes were in a tangled heap and the eiderdown was on the floor.

Simon remembered the light in Muriel's room, so he climbed the stairs and knocked on her door.

There was a stifled scream. ' It's Mrs. Iron.'

He heard his father mumble, ' Shut up ! '

Simon knocked again. ' Daddy. What has happened ? What has happened ? '

His father opened the door. Simon could see beyond him, into the room. Muriel Blade was sitting on the side of the bed, a revolting, sniffling figure, her hair tangled about her face, her coarse nightdress held tight around her. She was crying.

James Grantham was in his pyjamas. ' What do you want, Simon ? What do you mean by coming here like this ? You are interfering.'

' Interfering ! Good heavens, this isn't a

thing to talk about up here, in front of' . . . Simon directed his hand towards the bed . . . ' that.'

He walked down the stairs and his father followed him. They stood under the lamp in the hall.

' You believe the worst there is to believe, Simon, I suppose.'

' I believe nothing. I believe what you admit to me.'

' Then I am afraid there is nothing to say. I've stood all this long enough. I make no excuses. I've given up everything for you, and you turn on me and give your love away to somebody you hardly know ! '

' Love ! Does that mean you have to turn to your servant for some sort of substitute ? '

His father was calm. And hard. ' I'll do what I wish. This is my house. You tried to make out that I was mad before. But I'm not mad. I am a human being. I have given up everything, everything—everything.'

' And finally, you have given up your own honour and my respect, just to complete the sacrifice ! '

' I don't know what you mean by respect. If you respected me, you wouldn't make such demands of me : expecting my love for you, my son, my flesh and blood, to go on for years and have nothing in return—nothing. It was that that drove me to a frenzy before. And now I have found my own solution of it all. My own pleasure. That is what I want. My

own pleasure. I have squandered my love on you.'

'Oh, no, father. I don't want to be cruel. But it wasn't love. You have thought you loved me. But it was only maudlin, sentimental miserliness. If you loved me, you would be pleased over my happiness, but now that is over. This . . . God! You, my father! You!'

'I won't be corrected by my own son, I won't. I won't. Do you hear?'

'I am not correcting you. But I despise you for what you have done.'

James Grantham stretched out his hands and grabbed Simon by the shoulders. 'I hate you now, do you hear. I hate you. I hated your mother because she was part of you. And now I hate you because you are part of somebody else. I wanted all of you, or nothing. I don't want to share you with this—this person I don't even know—this actress.'

He shook Simon by the shoulders. Simon did not resist him.

Then his father took his hands away and beat them together.

'Daddy, you are wrong. What you've done is no reason why you should attack me. I have to make my own life and clear my own way.'

'Your way should have been my way. I wanted you, all of you. I wanted to keep you away from those people . . . all people. Miser, you say. Maybe. I make no excuse. I don't care, do you hear! I don't care! I'll tie you up, you truant, you boy. I'll tie you up.

You won't go. She shan't have you. And I'll do what I like. I'll do what I did, again, with my servant, in front of you, while you are tied up. Do you hear ! Do you hear ! '

He shook his malicious hands in front of Simon.

The lamp was behind him. He saw his own hands and the shadows they made on Simon's face. He saw the shadows of his thumbs moving up and down Simon's cheeks. He remembered the room, the screaming boy on the bed, the farm workers beating at the door, Simon's bleeding shoulder, the shadows of his thumbs . . . the candles. He swung one hand in the air and smashed the lamp glass. The white light became a sickly yellow flame, mounting into smoke.

He stretched out his hands and clutched Simon. ' Go away or I'll kill you. No ! I love you too much to kill you. Oh, Simon, go away from me. Go ! '

Simon opened the door and went out. He took the car out from under the trees and drove up the hill. Then he ran the car into the edge of the road, stopped, and walked back to the cottage. The light in Muriel's room was still burning.

He saw a light in his father's room, too. The upper light was extinguished. Then, through the curtains, he could see the shadow of his father. It grew less misty as he walked towards the bed, which was under the window. Simon walked up to the window then. He could

hear the clinking of a glass. For twenty minutes he waited. His father turned out the lamp. Still Simon waited. About midnight, he walked out of the garden, up the hill, to his car. Then he drove away, along the road towards Thaxted. Then he chose the road to London.

## CHAPTER V

### I

James woke to a white, late November morning. The garden was buried under snow which stretched up the hill until it seemed to be a wall, supporting the sky. The house was warm, but it shut him in too closely. Mrs. Iron brought him his breakfast, moving the table near to the fire. He could hear Muriel whisking a broom on the carpet upstairs.

She'd have to go.

He was aggravated by the warmth, the certainty of the house and the stillness of the white outside, the stiff trees, with the snow hanging on them, like cotton pods. He put on his coat and went to the village. The pond was frozen and a goose fluttered its wings and wondered why its feet would not penetrate the water. Everything was white, streets and roofs and window sills, and the carved huntsman outside the inn had his horn filled with snow, and his hair was white as if he'd grown very old overnight. The houses were remote and still and the anger and the nervous tension within him made him want to pick them up and crush them into little pieces, as he'd crush matchboxes in his hand. He had no friendly feeling for the

villagers now ! their bovine simplicity annoyed him. He passed them without answering their ' Good morning, sir.' They were coarse ! their red faces were flagrant ! their hips and shapes were hideous and the three or four children near the village store were unfortunate, unattractive. A little girl said, ' Good morning, sir,' and he scowled at her. Then his mood changed, so he called her back and took her into the store and bought her a bag of liquorice allsorts. He hurried down the street and his anger returned to him. Then he went back to the house, his boots and his coat and his hat speckled with white. He sat in front of the fire and threw two logs at the still, red glow. There was a crinkling noise of sparks in the chimney. If only Simon could have understood. There was so much to understand, and so few people had ever understood anything. If only Simon were there, in that other chair, that faded, magenta velvet with the fantastic back. Simon always sat in it and when he was home he would have a fountain pen or a pipe or matches jammed down into the crease in the seat of the chair. James stretched his hand over to see if there was anything in the crease now ! there was a camphor ball, quite an old camphor ball because it had almost evaporated away.

He rang the bell and Mrs. Iron came to him.

' I want to see Muriel in an hour's time. Circumstances have arisen ' (he said this in a loud, even voice, as if he were addressing a

meeting) 'which make it necessary that I should dismiss her, but I'll see that she's all right. You must not tell her or discuss it before I see her.'

'Yes, sir, but——'

'I am afraid it is final, Mrs. Iron, and I must be quite firm about your not discussing the matter with her. And will you please bring me some brandy. I'm not feeling very well.'

'Yes, sir. I'm sorry, sir. Is there anything else I can do, sir?'

'No, thank you.'

He wrote a letter to Simon, and he tore it up. He thought of phrases and answers. He built up conversations and explanations. Then he decided that there'd be neither explanation nor excuse. If only Simon could know what love really was, he'd come in the door and they'd look at each other, and speech would become a cheap and useless thing.

Some fiend had risen in him and made him do a thing that was unlike him, something that was not an expression of himself. All the morning he stayed in front of the fire. He drank glass after glass of brandy, and created a half stupor which made him imagine he had triumphed over his feelings. He thought his brain dulled was his brain triumphant! that sentiment and emotion and feeling were at last the slaves of his iron sense of right and reason. And thinking thus, he looked up and saw Muriel, a frightened, drooping figure in the doorway.

'Come in, Muriel.'

An arrow of cowardice entered his heart.

'I am—not—well. I am afraid that I must ask you to find another place, but I'll look after you in regard to money. I'll—I'll give you fifty pounds.' (His courage fainted for a moment and he loathed himself. But he persisted.) 'I'll give you fifty pounds, and you must go this morning. But I'll see that you get a place straight away and I'll give you a reference, a good reference— '

'Oh, it's awful, sir. I've never done such before—I don't really know! I ain't slept a wink! I'm sorry, sir, but I'm—I'm not to blame, sir. I'll go, sir.'

'All right, Muriel. I will give you your cheque now. I am sorry about all—all that has happened. And of course, you won't discuss this with Mrs. Iron before you leave. Indeed, I know you will not discuss it with anybody.'

'No, sir, I won't, oh, no.'

'If ever you want any help, you'll let me know.'

'Thank you kindly, yes, sir.'

She went out of the room.

The brandy fog gradually left him, and through the night and the day that followed he thought of nothing but his quarrel with Simon. He wrote some letters! he tore some of them up, but he posted two.

*'Dear, dear Simon, please try to understand that I am ill and unhappy and that what I did was because*

*of some fiend over which I have no control. I don't want you to pity me for what I've done but I want you to understand. If you'll only come back and be kind. I've always been so lonely, and just as we were so happy this has happened; all my fault, I suppose. Perhaps I should not write, dear Simon, but you have a greater character than I and you can do so much for me. You can fill in all the little gaps in my nature and my character with your own strength, if you will only be patient. And I can reward you with nothing but my love, and the respect I have for your attitude and your judgment.'*

At night he kept a lamp alight all the time, listening, until he wished the sense of hearing could be taken away from him. He imagined every car that passed the gate was Simon's car, and he tried to imagine that he knew the sound of the horn. Sometimes he thought he recognised it, and his heart beat unsteadily, and a chaos of first phrases tumbled through his head. Mrs. Iron knew that he was ill and she was quiet and kind. People came over the snow, up the village streets, and the sun burned down so that the ice on the pond cracked, and made clear spaces, in which the ducks swam again. The snow melted from the houses. Warmth and colour came back to the village. James sat in his chair, listening and waiting for Simon. But Simon did not come.

II

Judith walked through the Park to meet Simon on Sunday morning, a cold morning, the first after her return from Paris. There

were a few people on the green seats. Some were alone and seemed to look at the world eagerly, as if they sought some romantic relief from their loneliness. Others sat in twos, married perhaps, disinterested, the victims of a monotony. She wondered what marriage was meaning to them—how far they had ceased to be mutually attracted, knowing each other too completely.

Excess of familiarity spoiled love. There could be candour, the convincing, secure knowledge of possession, but there must also be a mystery unsolved. Judith would always possess that mystery against even Simon. It would be the personal mystery possessed by all women but by only a few men, because men believe that love breeds candour, while woman know it breeds mystery. People should be like a row of trees, mingling, interlaced, for some of the distance along which they meet. But there must be a place where the last lonely crowns of the trees move away from each other, alone, in a space, swaying against an infinity in which they are only subconsciously aware of each other's presence—a mystery in which the male was endlessly questioning and hunting, eluded. When a woman gives herself completely with a terrifying resignation, she should know that she is giving something that is not understood, perhaps not appreciated. And even the agony of that knowledge should add to her joy. It would be easy to give when appreciation and acknowledgment were handed

back in return. But to throw everything away, as only a woman could—that was the supreme, unselfish sacrifice a woman could make. That was what Judith thought of herself and Simon, as trees, growing together up to a point, but herself reaching alone, to the stars, alone, never to be completely drawn into the extending branches of himself, alone, by virtue of the secret that makes a woman smile serenely to herself at her own sacrifice, in the hour of night, when the man-child imagines he is an emperor, in complete possession of a weak woman. Judith knew she'd smile like that, when she was married to Simon.

She was to meet Simon at the Hyde Park Hotel. 'We'll have a cocktail before lunch—dull, Sunday in London. But where can one go? If you complain, I'll take you to the National Gallery,' he had written. She turned out of the Park, past two or three weather-worn old men selling newspapers, towards the hotel. Simon met her half way.

'Hullo, I walked along in case you were early.'

'Optimist Simon. Let us get out of this cold. I have walked all the way. Spartan and all that.'

They went into the hotel, and Judith threw back her coat, showing a deep maroon coat and skirt.

'You look wonderful, Judith.'

'You don't. Your tie is a dreadful thing,

and your hair ! Simon, when I marry you, I am going to make you brush your hair every day. Not once a week ! '

' I hate you to-day.' He smiled a denial after he had said it.

' But Simon, my dear little boy . . . all right, I am sorry . . . not dear little boy . . . very big brute, you must not wear that tie ! '

' I am sorry.'

' Oh, it is all right. You cannot be perfect yet. You have not known me long enough.'

They ordered sherry.

Simon said, ' You got my letter ? '

' Yes, but why haven't I seen you before if you came to town last night ? I have been nowhere. It is so cold. I just go back to that hotel, put my fingers in my ears so I cannot hear all those dreadful people, and run to my bedroom. I have two hot water bottles ! '

' I have been rather worried.'

' Worried—what—not your father ? '

' Yes, in a way. But not . . . well . . . he's not been ill.'

' Tell me.'

He hesitated.

' Don't be ridiculous, Simon. You want to, don't you ? '

' Yes, Judith, of course. Well, to make it all as short as possible, I went home last night and, well, Judie, I am not sure I can tell you. It is rather difficult. It's not pleasant.'

' You are being ridiculous again.'

' Well, I went home, and he did not expect

me. I found him coming out of Muriel's bedroom. Muriel, the servant we got from Bishop's Stortford. He had been with her—you know what I mean—he confessed it to me.'

'Oh, Simon. It doesn't sound a bit like him. But—well—go on.'

'I met him coming from her room. I am afraid I was terribly angry. I told him—well—I told him what I thought. We had a scene! oh, it was nasty. Then I went away. I wouldn't sleep there. And I have not been back since. I felt I couldn't stand it.'

'Simon, I think you are a prig.'

'But you don't think he was right . . . that there was any excuse . . . a servant girl and my father!'

'No, but it isn't your place to be indignant over his fault. Besides, in view of what you told me, about his being ill and all that, I don't think you did what was right. People need you far more when they are in the wrong than when they are right.'

'How do you mean, Judie? He said he wanted me to go. He said he hated me!'

'Simon, dear, I don't want to preach to you, but there is only one example for us to turn to in a crisis like this. Great love does not lie in a capacity for happiness, but in an ability and willingness to bear pain. The love of Our Lord for the lepers did not reach its greatest height when He cured them! but when they turned away from Him, ungrateful and unmindful of what He had done for them.'

'Oh, you are right—yes—you are right. I'll go to him— Yes, I'll go.'

'Is he at home now?'

'Yes. I suppose so. I had a letter from him yesterday. I did answer it, and I said I'd go down to-morrow.'

'Well, to-morrow is too late. After we've had lunch, you'll take me back to the hotel, we'll get a car, and I'll come as far as Bishop's Stortford with you. Then you can go on by train and be with him to-night. No, Simon, this is your test, my dear. True virtue isn't a thing that boasts of itself and sits in judgment of other people's faults. Anyway, one never knows why these things happen. I wouldn't dare judge your father about it.'

'Oh, I know you're right. You always are. You just think beyond me all the time. You see the other mile, somehow. Yes, I'll go, but I did want the day with you.'

They went to lunch in Soho. A street piano played in the square. They did not talk very much. Simon said, as he watched Judith peeling a walnut with a child-like smile on her face, 'Judie, I am so raw and unthinking that I wonder why you bother about me. I haven't one thing to give you—materially, mentally, spiritually—whatever you wish.'

She poured wine into his glass. 'Don't talk so much about those things. People are always trying to cut things up and comprehend them. It is only because they doubt them. Eat and drink and go to the country, and I'll

go back to the hotel and write you a long foolish letter so that you'll wake up to it in the morning. The quiet will be good for me.'

'Judie, when we are married, are you going to travel very much? You know I won't be rich. I'll have enough, I suppose—but—'

Judith interrupted him. 'Don't be crude!'

'Is it crude?'

'Yes!'

'I am sorry!'

She opened her bag and took out a small parcel.

'This is for you. It is a snuff box father used for cigarettes. I want you to have it.'

Simon said nothing as he opened it—slowly unfolding the tissue paper, revealing a Georgian snuff box, mellow and worn and lovely. Judith watched him. His eyes sparkled and his smile was that of a little boy finding treasures in the sand.

'I know why I love you, very young child,' she said to herself.

III

Simon arrived at the cottage late in the afternoon. He made a jumbled prayer, half to God, half to Judith, as he opened the door. The hall was warm and quiet, but he braced himself, as before a wind. 'James,' he called. 'James!'

His father came down the stairs, standing on the lowest step. Simon saw him as a shrivelled, pathetic child—he walked over to

him. ' Oh, daddy, I was a fool—oh, such a fool. I've come home to say I am sorry.'

They went into the sitting-room. James Grantham was still silent as Simon flung his coat at Mrs. Iron. ' Here, Mrs. Iron, it's wet. Please dry it for me as I am going back to Cambridge in the morning.'

' You are very good and kind to come back like this, my boy.'

' Oh, no. I was a fool. Judith showed me what a fool I am.'

' Judith ?—Judith Silver—you— '

' Yes, it's a long and wonderful story, daddy. You got my letter. I—I—well—I am very much in love with her. I have been with her a lot. Daddy—don't look so solemn—Daddy —we are engaged, and you haven't congratulated me or anything.'

James Grantham did not answer him. He seemed to be in the centre of a vast whirring machine—a noise like the beating of waves and the moan of a storm. Simon looked at him anxiously.

He was staring down at his hands, rubbing the knuckles of his thumbs, one against the other.

## CHAPTER VI

SIMON had been like a man climbing a hill during the three years at Cambridge, plodding in a determined, conscientious way, watching his own feet, moving step by step up the slope, through a thin twilight. Knowing Judith made him pause in his climb, turn, and see the distances around him : fresh astonishments and the patterns of unsuspected landscapes, the figures of people he had known, standing along the road in new and true perspectives. He discovered fresh dimensions of thought and when he was back in Cambridge, out of the first nervous realisation of his love for Judith, he was calm and patient, waiting for her return. He wrote to her every day and her letters came to him, from Paris, Vienna, and from Rome. From Rome she wrote, ' I am famous but tired. I go back to Paris to-morrow. Oh, Simon, think of the joy of going back to my rooms——seeing father's things. And I suppose that we'll be there together some time. But I cannot imagine you living in Paris. I'd have to teach you everything ; where to eat, where to go, all the theatres. But it would be—yes, that word you all use for any kind of

sensation in England—it would be "fun." I feel I shall know you better away from England. I love it, oh yes, but it is an unromantic place. You never escape from people in England. And all your songs are about the past: loves that have been, all yesterday. I want to sing songs about the to-morrows—there are no songs of hope in England. We will go to so many places. Oh, dear Simon, Thuringia in summer, those long roads, with the apple trees and the red rowan berries and the sun. The blue chicory flowers in the grass, the loaded harvest wagons. And oh, those golden valleys north of Naples, in autumn, and I want to teach you to love Paris too, because it is my home.'

Every experience in friendship in Cambridge became intensified for him now: the walks out among the cool grass on the fens became adventures: his wit was quickened.

Everything that happened to him was illuminated, given a silver edge. Ralph Alveston, more sophisticated now, nervous, affected, willowy, meant nothing to Simon: he was a loose-jawed figure peering out of a fog.

In February, Judith was to come to England. Simon went to Madeira with his father for Christmas, but they seldom talked. While his father sat on the verandah of the hotel, Simon climbed the coloured hills or swung in a hammock, looking down over the pink

houses and the tangle of vines and the tumbled buildings of Funchal, to the blue sea. He wrote from there to Judith, 'I am lonely, Judith, lonely because he seems to be so far away from me. He never talks at meals. And I do try to make everything easy. I wonder how you can bother loving me—my interests must seem closed in and tiny to you. But my love is not closed in. It stretches across the world and up too, my dear, to God, who makes this place so lovely, that I half forget being alone. I went to Mass yesterday. He would not come.'

Early in February, Judith set out for England. Again she packed away her father's clocks and boxes. She had sent some of her treasures to a bank—'This box, Auguste. My father loved it so and it is precious—yes, and this little clock—those are real stones, I suppose I should send it, too—and this and that, but oh, Auguste, you must have them out and in their place and all the clocks going when I come back, before I come back, because I always want this room to seem alive. I hate these covers and things. Yes, you *will* have all the clocks going for me, the day before I come back and no covers—just as if I'd been away for one day. You will, won't you? Because I'll be bringing somebody with me—I am to be married, Auguste—to an Englishman. Yes. So the clocks must all be going and alive—you will do this? And flowers. But the clocks! They are most important.'

When Simon knew Judith was coming, he wrote a letter to his father—a letter from London, where he was waiting for her.

> 'My dearest Daddy—Judith arrives on Tuesday. You have always avoided mentioning it—so I haven't told you quite everything. We are to be married. But you mustn't be silly and think what you did before. That is nonsense. We are to be the best of friends, all three. You will love Judie. Oh, I know you will. I am going to bring her straight down to you, so please have rooms ready. Ask Mrs. Iron to put flowers in Judie's room. I don't know what kind. But you'll know. You were always good at that sort of thing. I'll send a telegram about trains and all that. I am very happy, daddy, and I want you to be, too. You will. Judie is wonderful enough to make the whole world happy—'

He rolled Simon's letter into a fine cylinder, like an elongated cigarette. He did this carefully, spreading the sheet of paper on the table, turning an edge over and rolling it under the palms of both hands. He folded the cylinder, then doubled it again so that when he released it, it sprang apart and formed a W. He put it in his pocket, went into the hall, put on his coat and cap and walked out of the house. The village was white and still and the moon made it seem like a scene painted on glass. Through the window he could see the common red shade on the lamp in his hall. It gave a glowing, warm, comfortable light. The road that ran past the cottage, up the hill,

was quiet. The houses, too—they seemed to be holding their breath. James took a cigarette out of a packet. He tried to strike a match on a stone, but it was damp, so he walked up the road to a lamp-post. It leaned out at an angle from the bank. As he struck the match against the cold iron, somebody appeared from the shadow of the hawthorn hedge.

'Oh, Mr. Grantham, I've been waitin' to speak a word to you. I was afeared of comin' to the cottage 'cos of Mrs. Iron.'

'What is it, Muriel? What do you want to see me for?'

James walked away from the light and she followed him.

'Oh, sir, there's great trouble, sir, I'm, oh, Mr. Grantham, stay a bit while I tell you, sir, I'm sickening, sir, for a baby—I'm going to have a baby.'

Her voice seemed to twist itself, like a rope of sound being dragged from her.

'Don't talk,' he walked quickly, 'don't tell me! Why do you tell me? Can't you go away?'

'Oh, sir, it's me brother, sir, he's awful wild, sir.'

'Did you tell him?'

'No, sir, he guessed it. He knows all about those things, sir, from the war.'

She seemed to be smaller, as if her plight had made her wither. 'Oh, sir, don't walk away. I've prayed about it, sir. I've never done wrong before, sir, and me brother says I'm for

hell fire if I don't do something, sir. It's—it's breaking me heart, sir. 'E says he'd kill, yes, he did, sir—'E said 'e'd kill me and you if it wasn't fixed. Oh, sir, I don't want to be awful, sir. I was always good and never did no wrong.'

The hawthorn hedges drew in closer so that even the snow was dark: there was no silver ribbon of light between their shadows on the road. Muriel Blade was a little whimpering menace beside him now, whispering in the dark.

'Shut up, for God's sake!'

A bicycle wobbled down over the snow. 'Good night,' the rider said.

James answered him in a cheerful voice. There seemed to be a little laugh at the end of his 'Good night!'

'What's it to do with me? Do you want money? Tell me—' He put his hand in his coat pocket, through the slit, into the coat. Simon's letter. He twisted it around his finger.

'Oh, it's me brother said money, not me, sir. I never had such a notion, sir. It's too awful, sir, a judgment, sir.'

They turned a corner and came to a clearing of moonlight. Muriel's thin, strained face seemed to waggle on her narrow shoulders, as if it were hollow and swinging on elastic.

'Gawd'll never forgive us, sir! It's the name, sir, not the money, sir. This 'as never 'appened to one of us Blades afore, sir.'

He stood still. Bile forced itself up from his stomach. His mouth was bitter. Then it was

dry, so dry he coughed and was sick, spitting weakly, on to his hands. He lifted them towards his face. Muriel moved in front of him.

'Take pity, Mr. Grantham. It's the woman as bears the shame of it, sir. I felt as if they was lookin' at me shape already, sir, on Sunday. They in our village, I felt their eyes, sir. Oh, Gawd, sir, take pity.'

Her face was white, and almost phosphorescent. Her eyes were like holes. But he could see her white skin, the swinging parchment mask. He put out his hands—'Go away, oh, go away.'

The moon was behind him. His fingers made a trellis of shadow on her face. He moved his hands and he saw his black thumbs, growing, as with elephantiasis, immense thumbs, blotting out every feature of her face—and he heard the farm people beating at the door and Simon screaming and forcing his terrified body into the corner of the bed, and Simon asleep, and *his* thumbs making shadows on Simon's throat. And then the hot candles and the black sand and the house tottering in the storm. He slid his thumbs along the railing of the verandah of that lovely white bungalow above the river. They were wrapped up in linen, like little mummies, bigger mummies, growing, thumbs into two black bodies hanging in front of him, thumbs, he could feel the slush of the ditch, forcing its way in under his nails, and the ground was wet. He could feel it through the knees of his trousers. Her throat

was soft and flabby, like dough. He had forced his thumbs in so far, there must be two great holes there, going right through her neck. Perhaps his thumbs were still there. He lifted his hands to see them in the light. He stood up. Acids poured on things made them disappear. Bodies buried were dug up, and there was always a tooth missing or a mark to prove it. And pregnancy showed in a woman, even after she was a skeleton. Self-protection. He put his hands under her arms and dragged her towards the ditch, over it, through the hawthorn hedge. His cap was torn off, but he left it somewhere in the tangle of twigs and thorns.

Then he dragged her across the field. The village was white and silent. The menace had passed. It held its breath no longer. It had sighed, turned over and gone to sleep. At the second hedge he dropped her. Evidence. He had seen nobody. Not been seen. His cap, he'd get that. He lifted her shoulders again. Her heels made little furrows, marks in the snow. Finger prints. He took out his handkerchief and wiped her neck, where he had touched her. He moved her again, into the ditch. Then he crossed the field, found his cap, and walked back to the cottage. What a long way they must have walked—half a mile. And she hadn't said much—a baby. A murderer. Not very sensational being one. More sensational reading about them.

He took out his handkerchief again and tore

it in halves. Then he wrapped them around his thumbs and pushed his hands deep into his pocket.

When he was in the house, he unwrapped his thumbs and washed his hands. The mud was so deep and dry in his nails that he had to clean them with a wooden match, which he split in two. He sponged the knees of his trousers, and stood in front of the fire. His knees steamed, his hands too, when he held them out in front of the flames. His fingers made shadows on his own face. His thumbs were outlined against the glow. He moved so near the fire, his hands extended, that the cushions of his thumbs stung and throbbed with heat. His mind was asleep. Faint pictures were drawn through it, but they were faded and slow, like pictures in a stereoscope on a beach. A walnut tree, Simon, perfectly still, as in a photograph, his wife giving sugar to a parakeet, 'Cocky-cocky—poor cocky!' A bell rope in a farm house he went to as a child, a bottle of hair oil he never used. It stood on a shelf in the bathroom at Karangahake for two years. He poured four fingers of whisky into a glass and drank all in a gulp. He coughed and spluttered. Then he put the glass on the table. Such quiet, and that dead space outside, the unmoving village that had released its breath and gone to sleep, deep sleep.

He put his hands on the mantelpiece and stared at the fire with hard, stiff eyes.

Then he drew his hands away : ' Oh, Simon, oh, my Lord, I want somebody to hold me—I can't bear being so much alone. Oh, God, what am I to do ? '

He crumpled on to the floor and cried. For a long time he lay there. He thought of Simon crying against the tree. He had been intolerant of Simon. The law would be intolerant of him. He rubbed his thumbs on the hearth stones and stained them with ochre.

He stood up again—and then, with deliberate and noisy steps, he went to his bedroom and to bed.

## CHAPTER VII

England was white and cold, and there was snow on the ground when Judith arrived. She shivered on the deck of the boat, watching the sharp-winged gulls darting down to the wrinkled green water and the squat little boat rubbing its hips against the wharf. A boy walked along the deck, dragging a long rope after him. He moved rather like Simon. The same speed and sense of height about him. The gulls were almost too white against the water.

Then there was a succession of little stations, brown and uncomfortable. The houses seemed to have withered in the rain. The fields were white, and in one of them there were three cypresses, calm, like nuns, standing in the snow. Everybody seemed to be like Simon or to suggest Simon, even the Scottish soldier sitting on a milk can on a platform as they swept past. She saw the snow on his cap, as he sat there, swinging his legs, his kilt making the drab milk can, indeed the whole station, look quite gay. They passed some sloppy fowl yards. She had always hated fowls. If ever Simon and she lived in the country, they would never keep fowls. She felt so intensely

about it that she wanted to telegraph to him, 'Our wedding is off if ever you want to keep fowls.' Silly things, pecking about in the mud and living in those sheds, sitting on perches. The whole idea of a fowl was foolish.

And then those first London houses, so gloomy that she drew her coat closer about her. Those gloomy houses with their gaslight and dishevelled lace curtains and tin baths, hung on the wall above the steps. Sad, beaten houses in which the people were dirty; where the women cried and sniffled, and where babies lay on beds and clutched at the moon hanging out, beyond the smudgy windows.

The station was filled with yellow-brown fog, and a liquid light in which the people seemed to float, porters, chauffeurs in leather caps, barrows, and Simon, in a brown overcoat. He waved a newspaper to her and ran. All those other people seemed to shuffle towards the train. They were hesitating, suspicious people. He cut through them, like a knife. But his face was stiff, twisted. He did not speak at first. He held the paper out to her. He kissed her. 'Judie—my Judie, he's done something terrible—it—look—see—'

She read the evening paper.

'—servant murdered in Essex village—the body of a servant named Muriel Blade was found in a field in the village of ——, opposite the house of Mr. James Grantham by whom she was employed as a housemaid up to three months ago.—She lived with her parents and brother in a neigh-

bouring village and it is not known why she made the journey to the late scene of her employment. Marks on the throat indicate that she was choked to death by some person as yet unknown. The body was found this morning by a farm labourer and it has since been removed to the police station. The police have interviewed the relatives of the deceased and from a statement made by the brother, Charles Blade, who is a night watchman in a confectionery factory nearby, the police hope to make an immediate arrest. The murdered victim has lived in the vicinity all her life and is described as a quiet and pretty girl. She was for some time an assistant teacher in the village Sunday School— '

Judith held Simon's arm. His eyes were wide open. His hands moved erratically. ' It can only mean that he must be mad. Oh, Judie ! What am I to do ? '

Her manager was with them. ' There are reporters—what am I to do ? '

' No, I won't see anybody. I'll take this small bag. Put the others in the cloakroom—no—send them to the hotel, and get me a car—not a taxi—a closed car—straight away. I am going into the country.'

' But, Judie—you mustn't come ! '

' Yes, dear—don't fuss—now—Monsieur Martin, this is urgent. Don't ask any questions. Just do it ! I'll be back to-morrow, I suppose. I don't know. I'll telegraph you in the morning, perhaps to-night.'

They walked down the platform.

'Do you think he did it, Judie? Do you?'

'I don't know, dear. But be calm, Simon. We'll go down straight away, now. First I want to send a telegram to him. We must do that—you send it. Then I am going to insist on you drinking a large cognac, and then we'll go.'

He held her so tight that the blood jumped in her arm.

'You mustn't be brought into it, Judie. No. That won't do. Don't come. I can go. I must be with him.'

'Of course, I am coming—would I stay away from you now?'

They went into the noisy refreshment room. Judith herself ordered the cognac for him. She warmed it with her hands. 'Simon, dear, this is a time for being very sensible. We may be wrong. We may be using our worry on imagination. We can do nothing until we get there. If everything is all right, will it seem odd to him that I should arrive and stay the night?'

'No, of course not. But I feel it is wrong for you to come. Wrong, those reporters! They'll know. It mustn't hurt you. It mustn't touch you!'

'I can only answer that by moralising and there is no time for that!'

They did not talk when they were in the car, hurtling along the Seven Sisters Road, not until they were passing between the still, black and white trees of the Epping Forest.

'Judie, why does our love make me feel so secure, even now? I am not afraid—it's like something happening, a sad thing, but within secure walls—I don't know—why do we love each other?'

'I don't know, Simon. But should we know? Isn't it destroying a mystery to ask why? Sometimes I think that *why* is a sort of menace to happiness. If we trusted love; if we had faith, we wouldn't ask *why*. We'd accept love as a mystery. I think more beauty comes into life through faith in mysteries than the desire to analyse them. The mystery of the sacrament, dear—isn't that why it is the spiritual force going on for ever and ever, through the centuries. Because it is a mystery. Because it cannot be explained. Those people—non-conformists they call them! They tried to destroy the mystery of the sacrament and they destroyed beauty out of their lives. They committed the sin of destroying the spiritual mystery of their God by trying to know Him with their minds. Their faith was not enough.'

'Yes—I see—and love, too! Would you say that of love—of our love?'

'I think so, dear. It is a mystery. I suppose the mystery is the trinity—God's love pouring down, a divine stream passing down to us, between us. We've talked about it so often. People deny that because they have no faith. They imagine they can make happiness, a man and a woman, thinking they have the power to make their own happiness. That's why they

fail. They try to create happiness as a tangible fact, existing between two people, instead of accepting it as a divine mystery involving themselves and God. So don't let us hurt it by asking *why*, Simon. *Why* is the cry of the man who is full of despair. The man whose faith is dead, the man who is threatened with intellectual pride. That is the most ghastly sin of all, more terrible than the things poor little people do, you know, sins of the flesh, aren't they? Oh, I think it is almost more acceptable to God that we should be humble with a sin than proud with a virtue—don't you see that? I feel it is true.'

'Yes, I do. The mystery, Judie—is that why I can't explain my love—yes, I see—it seems to belong to an inner room where thinking has no power, where I cannot think. Oh, yes, Judie, I do feel that. You make it so easy—daddy never realised that about me. He thought he loved me. But I suppose it was only a desire to destroy my own mind and impose his own will on mine—yes, a sort of selfish, destroying love, and it only destroys him—and all the more terrible for him, Judie, isn't it? He needed me more then than if it had been a real love—you said once—love—what was it—you must give it according to the need of other people, not just when you want to give it—it must be a response to a human need, not obedience to your own desire—'

They were in Epping then—wet, grey

Epping. Then out into the open country again, village after village, until it was dark, so dark that the houses beside the road seemed to shrink, curl up and go to sleep.

## CHAPTER VIII

JAMES stayed in his bedroom all day. From the side window he could see the lane winding up the hill to the last curve, where it turned down and disappeared, leading to the next village. Mrs. Iron brought him some breakfast. He swallowed a cup of tea, in one gulp, burning his tongue and the roof of his mouth. He went to the window and sat in a chair. He could see the road higher up the hill, where it skirted the field across which he had taken Muriel Blade's body. The snow was melting and the cedar branches had shaken off their white burdens and had righted themselves again. He thought he could see the torn hawthorn and the gap and the trails of her heels, where he had dragged her.

He wondered how long he'd have to wait for them to come. He had not put on a waistcoat and his tie was loose. He curled it around his thumbs and then he hammered his nails, one against the other, until they were red with blood.

The hawthorn line curved so that he could see into the field. About lunch time, he saw a man running across, jumping from furrow to furrow. It was the funny man who always

carried a sack on his shoulders. He worked for those people whose farm jutted on to the Thaxted road. The man wore no coat and his open waistcoat was flapping, this way and that way. He remembered seeing the man in the store one day. He always wore that waistcoat, a sort of huckaback, hand-worked thing in browns.

Spring would be here soon. There were one or two bedraggled crocuses under the window but the snow had beaten them back again. There was new wood on the willows. The sun played with it and made the trees look as if they were covered with pink-yellow tulle.

When the man appeared on the road, he had his bicycle with him. He rode off, up the hill. Then James could see him no more. Mrs. Iron brought him some letters. 'There's none from Master Simon, sir, as I can see: just a few manillas, sir. Circulars, I'm thinkin'.'

He did not look at them. He found that the paint on the window sill was so old and dry that when he rubbed it with his fingers, it came off in a fine powder and whitened the cushions of his thumbs. The snowdrops under the apple tree were very thick and white, as white as the snow—of course, snowdrops meant that. And the aconites with their gold heads and green ruffs: they made a smear of yellow over there sheltered from the snow, by the shed where they kept the spades and the rake and the seed potatoes.

A Ford car came down the hill. He recognised it. It was the police car from the next village. If he stood on the chair, he could see more clearly, hanging on like that, hanging on to the window frame with his fingers. They stopped the car near the gap in the hedge and then they got out and disappeared. Then they reappeared and he watched them cross the field. There were four of them. Strange how snowdrops were bulbs the same as jonquils and daffodils and yet they came out like this, first. Rather brave of them. He could not see the four men now, so he sat down again. Mrs. Iron came in to talk about lunch.

'I don't want any and don't come in again,' he said. 'Go away. Go home!'

He got up and locked the door.

When he went back to the window and climbed on to the chair, he could see them coming back, across the field. They were carrying Muriel Blade. They jogged along, stumbling over the furrows, and Muriel Blade seemed to be swinging as if she enjoyed it. Perhaps she wasn't dead. A dash of water in the face. Eau de Cologne. But she must be dead, all night out there. He'd killed her all right. He rubbed his thumbs in the paint dust again. They put her in the back of the car. Those noisy, shaky Fords. He hoped they wouldn't take him off in a Ford. A pity they didn't mix the aconites and the snowdrops. But perhaps they wouldn't grow well like that. The car was gone. Twelve o'clock, one

o'clock, two o'clock. He was hungry after all. No, sick. No, of course, he was hungry. Before they hanged people they always got a good meal. Mushrooms. He'd like mushrooms now. But it was the wrong time.

He went out into the kitchen. Mrs. Iron was not there. He found a piece of cake and a glass of milk.

Then back to the window. He picked out the putty from the corner against the glass. It was as dry as the paint and it had contracted and split into little blocks.

The Ford car came down the hill again at three o'clock. But it stopped at the gap in the hawthorn hedge. They were a long time in making up their minds. Why did he always look at his hands? He had always done that. Why not his feet?

He imagined them twisted and stretched, dancing at the end of a rope. But feet weren't always like that. There were children's feet. His had been like that once. Little bits of things, playing with a shawl fringe. And then when they grew up a little and were able to run, they had climbed among the old timber and over the fence, down by the cowshed, and over that big gun from the South African war. He had fallen off and hurt himself. And then feet, browning on the decks of white yachts and dancing to the tunes of violins; no! Nothing as fine as violins. That old accordion Uncle Joe used to play after the shearing was over, when they invited all the shearers up

and they told him stories of Australia. Bloody awful place. Sorry he had ever gone there. If he hadn't gone there, he wouldn't have married and if he hadn't been married, he would not have Simon, and if there was no Simon, no anything. But then, feet never stopped there. They grew old, like his. They had to finish dancing at the end of the rope, against the curtain of the morning sky. In America they didn't do that. But you surely felt the shock. There was no such thing as instantaneous. Just a brief gap and . . . you *must* feel it for a millionth part of a second. And that would be enough.

By dragging his thumbs along the sill, one from each end, meeting in the middle, each brought a little tide of paint dust with it. They met and made a mountain. But the wood was hard, and it wore the skin off his thumbs.

The car went away again. But one of the men walked down the hill. Then the hedge swallowed him up. Would he come to the cottage? No. In the thin parts of the hedge, James could see him. He was walking up and down, up and down.

Why didn't he come into the house?

He wasn't in a uniform.

But he was so big and coarse. He was a policeman all right. The people in the village must know by now. Perhaps they were all hanging over the railing around the pond, seeing it was the first fine day, talking it over. 'He was always queer. I saw it from the first!'

Mrs. Tucker had said so to the fool of a tutor, long ago. He had overheard her.

They'd all be there, those women with their vast hips and those men with the yellow tobacco stains on their whiskers and the heavy furrows in their skin, and the blackheads . . . he had been almost sick when that man in the store spoke right into his face. They'd be there, talking it over. A murder ! A real murder, with papers and police, and a trial and a hanging.

When he pressed his face against the glass, he could see the rooks wheeling over the house. He could see the sharp points of their wings moving against the sky : like the blades of scissors cutting blue silk.

The man came up to the hedge once and peered through a gap. Why in the hell didn't he come in ? Wasn't he there, sitting at the window, waiting for them ?

Mrs. Iron knocked on the door.

' Go away.'

' A telegram, sir.'

A hoax to get him out of the room. She had been bribed by the police.

' Go away ! '

She pushed it under the door.

He went over and picked it up. From Simon, of course. Simon knew by now. Newspapers. Loathsome things, newspapers. He knew them for what they were worth.

' Leaving London immediately with Judith, by car. Arrive about six. All my love, dearest daddy, Simon.'

If that wasn't a hoax! 'All my love, dearest daddy.' Rotten little toad. Turncoat, twister, thief. Coming here with that theatrical whore. Not if he knew it. He'd like to have Simon alone now, in a vast empty room and thrash him with a stock whip.

He went back to the window and watched the man walking up and down. Again he came to the gap in the hedge.

'Come in and get me,' James shouted, through the closed window. But the man didn't hear him. Perhaps Mrs. Iron would go out and bring him in. So silly, walking up and down there. Once he read about a man being hanged and some filthy thing happening. It was a sort of medical report of it all.

He'd go and tell Mrs. Iron and she could bring the man in.

He went out into the kitchen. 'Mrs. Iron, Mrs. Iron, tell that man to come in here and get me!'

But Mrs. Iron was not there. She was out in the garden, bringing in some tea towels from the line.

He saw her unpegging them when he bent down to look out, through that low window over the sink.

He went upstairs to Simon's bedroom. That was much better. And the window sill was varnished, so he couldn't rub off that filthy, dusty paint. They'd arrive very soon. He hadn't a watch. They always stopped when he wore them on his wrist. *Electricity*, the

watchmaker said. They never would go. And that travelling clock—the one with the Watteau landscape on the face—Simon had taken it to Cambridge with him.

But it must be late, because the sky was already a deep blue—black. If you looked at it long enough, you could see anything in it. Forms and things. His fingers were quite sore with that rubbing. He had always done silly things. He wrapped them in his handkerchief.

He looked up the hill. There was nothing moving in the dark. Then he looked down, but he could not see the man walking up and down. Perhaps they wouldn't suspect him after all. He had always exaggerated things. 'Control your imagination,' they had said to him. 'It'll carry you into trouble if you are not careful.' And he had said, 'Oh, father, you don't understand me.' 'Perhaps it's a good thing I don't,' his father had answered. He and his father had never got on well together.

They might arrest anybody. Muriel's brother. She said he had a foul temper. He might have throttled her. He looked up the hill again, and he could see two motor cars coming down. One was quite near. The other was on the brow of the hill. The nearest one stopped in front of the cottage. A chauffeur got out. James could see the light on his leather cap, when he walked around in front of the car, to open the door from this side. Two people got out. Simon and Judith.

They did not wait. They hurried towards the door.

The other car was near now. It was the police car. Only the police car would come like that, with those weak lights. Judith and Simon were at the gate.

If he ran out and stopped that other one. If he held his arms out and forced it back——

He ran from the room, down the stairs and out of the back door. He ran across the garden, hitting his legs against the stretched strings, towards the hedge. Through that gap, into the arms of the man who walked up and down. No ! He was not there.

Out into the road. He ran in the gutter. If he held out his arms and pressed his thumbs, those gigantic thumbs, against the radiator of the car, he could force it back, back, back, so that it would never come near them again. The noises in his head—the thunder of bass chords, beaten on a piano, negroid thumbs pounding on the white ivory : chord upon chord, his head a sound-box in which they chased one another, sound after sound, an avalanche of sounds, falling about him.

He stumbled in the wet ditch. He frightened a horse. It snorted and galloped away over the field. He stood up again and ran out into the road, his arms raised, his thumbs forced out in front of him. He ran from the ditch, at the car. When it hit him, he crumpled into a heap and fell in the mud.

Simon opened the door of the cottage.

'Don't be so excited, my angel. Don't tremble. Don't rush. I'm with you,' she said.

But he clattered the key against the lock, and when the door moved, he banged it open, against the inner wall.

She held him until she closed the door behind them.

'Let me go, Judie, let me go. I must find him. My poor daddy. Let me go.'

But she held him. Both her arms were around him as they stumbled about the house, from room to room. 'Daddy, it's Simon—daddy—daddy—' They stumbled up the stairs and still Judith held him, close against her, as he screamed 'Daddy, James, daddy, where are you? It's Simon. I've come to be with you. Daddy, it's Simon. I've come to be with you.'